BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

THE WRITINGS OF STUART PRATT SHERMAN

By (Mrs.) Alice Zepfler Farnham, B.A.
Wellesley College, 1918) Submitted
in partial fulfillment of the re-
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Master of Arts, 1942

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by

First Reader.....Thomas R. Mather.....
Chairman of the English Dept. C.L.A.

Second Reader.....George M. Sweath.....
Professor of English Literature

# PREFACE

Stuart Pratt Sherman has taken his place in the literary history of American literature as a literary critic. He is known principally for his attack on the Liberal critics and writers, especially on Mr. H. L. Mencken, his principal foe of the opposite camp of Liberal critics. He is also known for his defense of the conservative point of view in American criticism and then changing over to the liberal viewpoint.

But it is the purpose of this book of selections of the writings of Stuart Sherman, to introduce the young student to his writings as a man of letters, as he desired to be. The selections have been made from a literary viewpoint, only including some of his critical ideas to give a more complete view of his writings as a whole.

His writings are so extensive that it has been necessary to limit the selections to the books which Mr. Sherman published himself. The book, Portrait Medallions of Men of Letters of the British Isles, has been included, also the three posthumous volumes: Main Stream, Shaping Men and Women, and The Emotional Discovery of America, all of which books contain his essays. This excludes his verse, journal, letters, editorials, book reviews, text-books, except as mentioned in the introduction.

The books are arranged in chronological order; and the procedure has been to comment on the books sufficiently to give the reader a better understanding of the selections.

It is hoped that this book may lead the student to further study of his writings, believing that it will enrich his literary knowledge, broaden his culture, and be an inspiration to his scholarship. Moreover, he will come in contact with the engaging personality of Mr. Sherman, a good fellow, a scholar, a cultured gentleman, a man of letters as well as a critic, and a great man.

The Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman in two volumes written by Mr. Sherman's lifelong friend and college classmate Homer Woodbridge, and Jacob Zeitlin, a professor at the University of Illinois, an associate of Professor Sherman, contain an exhaustive bibliography of all Mr. Sherman's writings. [1]

1. Woodbridge, Homer, & Zeitlin, Jacob, Vol. L, Vol.II, Life and Letters of Stuart Sherman. Farrar and Rhinehart, 1929. N.B. See also Vol.II, pp.803-860 for complete bibliography.

Stuart Sherman
His Writings

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## Men of Letters of the British Isles

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# INTRODUCTION

A PORTRAIT OF MR. SHERMAN
By
Mr. Frank Swinnerton

"It was one of the most attractive personalities--to myself, that I have ever encountered. Sherman was a very shy, quiet man, who fled from the general society of men; but he was none the less deeply liked and respected by those who came closely into contact with him. The reason for this was in part his modesty, but in part also his extraordinary sympathy. He gave me the impression of being a poet, with a love of beauty which only the very rarest of men possess. . . . . Sherman was not a verbose talker, but he did not strike me as a silent man. With that little smile which he so frequently wore, with the almost lisping, quiet voice which made me instantly at ease with him, with his reserve, his darkness and fineness of feature, he kept an admirable lightness of tone. There was quality in him, and there was delicacy. Impossible, I think, to know him without liking and respecting him--very much indeed--more than one likes and respects most of those who are not one's intimate friends."[1]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 642.

# I

## Stuart Sherman the Man

## 1881 - 1926

Stuart Pratt Sherman was a fascinating personality. He was a brilliant man and very much alive. His gospel was work mixed with the comic spirit, eschewing a cause and an incentive, striving to attain his goal. The study of life was his province, which he saw reflected in literature; Matthew Arnold was his guide; "sweet reasonableness" his creed, with the epistles of John added. A writer of talent, of great wisdom and knowledge, who with love for his fellow men, is known by his works. He sought culture for himself and "passed it around" to others.

# II

## Stuart Sherman - A Man of Letters

The following quotation found in his journal is only one of the statements among others in his writings that Stuart Sherman desired to be a man of letters.

Journal

December 22, 1923.

"I wish to be a man of letters (and nothing else) and that soon:--to be able in all serenity to sit down and devote myself to thought and expression and nothing else. Not to consume my strength in instruction and fracas. To flee from official and formal contacts and live in personal relations with my world."[1.]

1. Life and Letters, Vol.IIp.595

# A Man of Letters

## "Literature and the Government of Men"

Excerpt

Ideally speaking a man of letters aims to know the personality, the moving spirit of life in society. He seeks to know the character of national literature as one knows a person by a vital imaginative synthesis of diverse phenomena. Consequently his major interest is in those branches of knowledge in which personality predominates; in those expressions of life which are most individual; in those forms of expression which are most clearly marked with the accent and intonation of the human spirit.

If this is his point of view he will be essentially a man of letters, whether his field is philosophy, history or poetry-or whatever else.

The man of letters is studious of the personal and individual elements in literature because he perceives that the social government exists from man to man, and that he would govern his neighbor must govern him by the stress of spirit upon spirit. It is those men he sees that edge the common ideas and feelings of the masses with flame from an enkindled personality who become the chief agents of the social will.

"Genius of America" Page 248

# The Mission of a Man of Letters

## "Literature and the Government of Men"

Excerpt

The mission of a man of letters is to be at the point where through the brazen dome of old habits and customs, breaks the thin radiance of new truth. This last and highest function his divinely dangerous function, committed to him by the great society, is to promulgate the new law in despite of the old one, and, by every power of imaginative representation at his command, to make it prevail from end to end of society, and govern in the ideas and emotions of men.

"Genius of America" Page 266

# III

## Mr. Sherman's Principal Literary Views as a Man of Letters

As a man of letters, Stuart Sherman embraced literature as an art; he considered it as one of the fine arts, like music, painting or sculpture, and he speaks of writing as the art of expression.

His theories of literature as an art are found chiefly in the essays, "The Genius of America", and "Literature and the Government of Men; an Apology for Letters in the Middle West".

His principal theory is that art has a purpose. "Best of all", he says, "in the field of art, is a term which cannot be defined without some reference to what art is so fond of denying itself, its purpose". He believed that the literary theorists of the stricter aesthetic schools who use the phrases, "Truth for truth's sake," "Art for art", "Art for art's sake," and "Beauty is its own excuse for being," were mistaken. He believed that "literature which makes aesthetic gratification, the end of existence defeats its own end". "The modern attempt",he says, "to distinguish between the field of belles-lettres and the other fields of learning by reference either to the form or to the substance breaks down at every point,for literature broadly considered has one subject, the representation of man in his environment. It has one satisfactory form, that which perfectly expresses the subject, and that the primary object of all the arts of expression is persuasion".

According to Mr. Sherman, "the purpose of art, music, literature is that rightly used, they are both the causes and consequences of happiness. They are the seed and the fruit of that fine and gracious national life towards which we aspire". "All the arts", he says, "are ministers to the inarticulate hungers of the heart, to which all the arts are merely some of the ministers. Other ministers are religion, morality, patriotism, science, truth".

Mr. Sherman looked upon fine art in America as a Democratic art, for as he says, "Art is rooted in a social instinct in a desire to communicate good to others, to share one's private experience and anticipation. It is the spontaneous overflow of thoughts that we can't consume alone". The artist, therefore, has a social responsibility, and art becomes also a moral art. "For in America", he says, "it will be found more and more that the artist who does not in some fashion concern himself with truth, morals, and democracy, is unimportant, is ignoble". Of the function of poetry, Mr. Sherman quotes Mr. Emerson as follows: "The high poetry of the world from the beginning has been ethical, and it has been the tendency of the ripe modern mind to produce it". Further, he adds, "An artist expresses the profound moral idealism of America". All artists in America according to Mr. Sherman, are emminent builders of civilization; moulders of the national genius, and, "When art becomes thus informed with the larger life of the country, it vitalizes it, and gives permanency to the national ideals".

In the essay, "W. C. Brownell", he speaks of criticism as a fine art, but he considers the critic an artist of a lower rank than a creative artist.

Art serves its purpose most effectively as it most nearly embodies the beautiful and the true. Of beauty, he writes, "Beauty, whether we like it or not, has a heart full of service". Of truth, he quotes Mr. Emerson, "Honor every truth by use". In the essay, "Literature and the Government of Men", Mr. Sherman adapting a phrase from Plato speaks of the republic of letters, and he writes the following concerning truth in art. He says there are spirits of the great society ranked in three orders--- according to the completeness of their powers of expression, the perfections with which they have accomplished their wills. "In the lowest order are those who have managed only to stammer forth some truth; and in the second order are those who have expressed some truth beautifully; and in the third and highest order are those who have expressed a great truth beautifully in speech and in act. But not even the spirits in the highest order are utterly satisfied with their achievements. Continually before them, imagination projects an elusive vision of the perfect truth, the perfect beauty, the perfect goodness of which the reality is hidden in the bosom of the All-Perfect". According to Mr. Sherman it is the mission of a man of letters to promulgate the new truth which breaks through the brazen dome of old habits and customs (see excerpt p8).

Throughout Mr. Sherman's writings, one sees evidence that he combines fine art with practical art. In the "Conversations with Cornelia", for example, criticism is written in semi-fiction, and there are passages of description, classic in their beauty; or in many of the essays written for the N.Y. Herald Tribune "Books", such as "Modern Men and Lion's Marrow", "William Beebe as Merman", "Walter de la Mare", Pierre Loti", and others, where the subject is treated with imagination and beauty, to serve for the uses of Journalism.

As a conclusion to the essay, "The Genius of America", Mr. Sherman cites Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby who lost her five sons in the Civil War, as an illustration to what follows. He says:

> "The words are thrilling still with the pathos and splendor of patriotic death. -- One can hardly read the letter through with dry eyes; and yet reading it makes one very happy. It makes one happy because it uplifts the heart and purges it of private interests, and admits one into the higher and more spacious and grander life of the nation. For my purposes I am not writing an anti-climax when I say that it makes one happy because it is the perfect expression of a deep, grave, and noble emotion, which is the supreme triumph of the expressive arts. It is the work of a great artist. Was it Lincoln? Or was it the America of our dreams? It was the voice of the true emancipator of our art, who will always understand that his task is not to set Beauty and Puritanism at loggerheads, but to make Puritanism beautiful".

## Some of Mr. Sherman's Critical Ideas as Literary Critic and as Literary Commentator

The years 1907-1926, during which Mr. Sherman was both professor of English at the University of Illinois and literary editor of "Books", seen against a literary background, was a period synchronous with the great war 1914-1918.

The literature of America of this period as seen through such writers as Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, James Branch Cabell, Edgar Lee Masters, Charles Norris and others, revealed cynicism, disillusion, and pessimism in American thought; it showed that the writers were in revolt against civilization.

The newly risen schools of literary critics were divided into two main factions, the Conservatives and the Liberals. The representatives of the conservative group were: W. C. Brownell, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, S. E. Woodbridge and Stuart Pratt Sherman. Four of these were Harvard men. Mr. Brownell was from Amherst. All with the exception of Mr. Brownell were professors.

These critics stood for the doctrine of Humanism in their approach to judging literature. Their philosophy was called "the negative philosophy" for the reason of their belief that man should control nature by an inner check and discipline. Theirs was a "moralistic" criticism. Professor Babbitt was opposed to romanticism and all these humanists stood for tradition, the Puritan tradition, and for democratic principles.

Opposed to this group, was a school of critics, represented by Mr. Spingarn, H. L. Mencken, Ludwig Lewisohn, Harold Stearns, Randolph Bourne, Charles Hacket, Mr. Huneker, and others. They were critics from the Mid-West; their literary center was Chicago. They believed that literature as art should be judged by the aesthetic standards only; that criticism should not be concerned with morals or ethics. Puritanism to them was a synonym for sinister repressions. They did not value tradition, and many of them were individualists, with no responsibility to society.

Because of their views, the critics as well as a group of writers were called in addition to "Liberals" - "Realists", "Radicals", "Veritists", "Those of the Naturalistic Philosophy", "The Decadents", "The Futilitarians", "The Bohemians", and by Mr. Sherman, "The Younger Generation", "The Barbarians" and other such names.

Mr. H. L. Mencken, founder of "The American Mercury" and co-editor with Jean Nathan, had a tremendous influence over the young people for ten years. This power arose with the cynicism after the war and his literary advent came with contributions to the "Smart Set". In his series of "Prejudices" and other writings Mr. Mencken was destructive in his criticism of American institutions and ideals. He was anti-Puritan, anti-democratic, anti-social. He satirized the clergy, the college professors, and his reviews were brutal.

Professor Sherman believed that he should combat the ideas of this group of critics, especially those of Mr. Mencken, considered the arch-rebel of the group. He engaged in controversial

writing by writing such articles as "The Belligerent Young", and "Mr. Mencken and the Jeune Fille in Letters". It gave him a motive also for writing the essays - "Tradition", "The Genius of America", and "What is a Puritan?" In 1917 Mr. Sherman published the book, "On Contemporary Literature", judging writers according to humanistic standards. In the prologue, he discussed the differences between humanistic ideals and ideas and those of the naturalists.

Other critics of the period not mentioned in the above groups, who were friends of Mr. Sherman's, are Van Wyck Brooks, Carl Van Doren, and Henry E. Canby.

Mr. More was a source of inspiration to Mr. Sherman when the latter was editor of "The Nation", and Mr. Sherman was contributing reviews to that journal, and Mr. Sherman was influenced by Mr. Babbitt as a student under him at Harvard. In his lectures he found the basis of his critical philosophy, the humanist's doctrines. Although he was influenced by Professor Babbitt, he was a disciple of Matthew Arnold, in fact, he has been called the Illinois Arnold. In his book, Matthew Arnold and How to Know Him", there are many parallels between the two men. Mr. Sherman thought Arnold a suggestive guide to a man who is trying to discover what he ought to think on most subjects which concern him. The principal critical ideas which Mr. Sherman obviously adopted from Matthew Arnold were that literary theory could be applied to life, and that "the great men of culture are those who have a passion for carrying the best knowledge and the best ideas of their time, from one end of society to the other".

Mr. Sherman's critical views were also en rapport with Mr. Brownell's. In the essay, "W. C. Brownell", are statements which Mr. Sherman makes concerning Mr. Brownell, which apply also to Mr. Sherman as critic and to his criticism. There are also interesting side flashes of Mr. Sherman's own view of criticism, as illustrated in the following examples:

> "The business of intelligent criticism is to be in touch with everything. Mr. Brownell took it for granted that the humanization of man in society is the established object of the arts and letters, just as modern men of science take for granted evolution and gravitation."
>
> "As personality is the soul of art, to state it - that is to produce its characteristics in critical terms - is, as Mr. Brownell declares, the crown of critical achievement."
>
> "The special field of all vital criticism is the contemporary scene."
>
> "It is the service of a critic to begin that elevation of the level of one's private thinking upon which the level of public thought and the increase of charm in our society and in our letters ultimately demand."

Although Mr. Sherman's critical ideas were parallel to Mr. Arnold and Mr. Brownell, he himself was a critic of other critics, critics of the past as well as the modern French critics, and formulated his own critical beliefs. According to Mr. Zeitlin Mr. Sherman went through three phases as a literary critic. First he was humanist, the second phase, he was a champion of democratic principles,which differed from the democracy of Mr. More and Mr. Babbitt, and was Mr. Sherman's contribution to the new humanism. The third phase, he became more liberal in his viewpoint.

One thing which Mr. Sherman stresses about criticism is that it should have a purpose, and his reason for not opposing the standards of the aesthetic school was that it had no raison d'être. And it is the obiter dicta of the critic's duty, he adds, to discover an adequate point of view. Further significant statements which he makes concerning criticism are:

> "The work of taste and judgment will never rest in complete security unless it rests upon the work of a thorough historical investigation".
>
> "One of the constant marks of a critic of taste is the citation of passages".
>
> "To seek absolute truth not in this world face to face, but to press nearer to it, is the sovereign business of criticism".

Mr. Sherman as a professor and as a scholar critic and as a man of letters, in addition to writing book reviews for Journals (which he later published in books) took full cognizance of the needs of his times and used his critical ideas to remedy them.

In the essay, "Points of View in American Criticism" he sees in America the pessimism of our bourgeoisie; they were quarreling, he says, with the quality of their civilization. "The remedy of pessimism, " he writes, "is in short to effect a re-integration of the national will on the basis of a genuine democratic humanism, recognizing as its central principle the duty of bringing the whole body of the people to the fullest and fairest human life of which they are capable. The point of view is not, as it has been called moralistic. It is essentially religious. The object gives the standards of criticism".

After the war, Mr. Sherman saw the need of strengthening the national spirit, in the hope that a strong Americanism would lead to internationalism, and he published the volume Americans.

Having the standards in mind that he stated in "Points of View in Our Criticism in America", he sees the need of a national preparation for culture. Six months after "Americans", he published the volume "The Genius of America", indicating that culture may be found in Art and in letters, and that the new culture must evolve from a democracy. Mr. Sherman stressed the need of tradition, of the Puritan tradition as defined in the essay, "What is a Puritan?" It is the formative spirit in America, the modern spirit and the Puritan has a passion for moral perfection. He stressed the need of the modern spirit, and democracy as standards for American culture. His criticism was constructive. In the preface to his book, "Points of View" he intimates a need for a professional group of critics in America. Like President Lowell, he saw that we must have a literary criticism before we have an American literature.

Mr. Sherman saw the needs of the spiritual welfare of the younger generation, in the post-war time, when there was Prohibition in America and Victorian and conservative standards in conduct were being questioned. He wrote critical essays on religion, morality, conjugal happiness, on sex, chastity, etc. which he published in the book, "My Deal Cornelia".

The volumes above mentioned indicate the subject of Mr. Sherman's criticism as a professor.

Because of Mr. Sherman's considered romantic view of Democracy, he became further removed in his viewpoint from Mr. More and Mr. Babbitt.

In 1924, when Mr. Sherman left the academic world to become a critic and writer for a large cosmopolitan audience, he had thrown down his glove on his former point of view and declared that he was a Liberal and not yet ready for the conservative group of critics. He states his new standards and views in the preface to the volume "Critical Woodcuts". He also states his views as critic in the first essay which he wrote for the Tribune now printed in the volume, "The Main Stream". The title of the essay is, "Disinterested? No!"

His standards of judging a book had changed to merely - "Is the book alive?" But he still maintained as critic, his responsibility to society. He stated in his journal, that he had resolved for the rest of his days to write to make people happy. He was in quest of the good life, but he would always be exploring to find out what was the good life.

His new position as critic placed him in sympathy with the new writers and he was instrumental in having both Sherwood Anderson and Joseph Hergesheimer elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters.

In the address, "The Emotional Discovery of America", delivered on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the academy will be found Mr. Sherman's new viewpoint toward American letters, and on the new literary trend:

> "The America which we are now discovering is something of a shock to a good many people, but I think they will recover from it....Prudent persons may not like the present generation of explorers, their vocabulary of their manners or their criticism of life....Happily our purpose here is fulfilled and one pleasure is keenest when we are recognizing and applauding the various aspects of the great literary movement which is taking place under our eyes, giving us on the whole the stimulating sense that ours is one of the valorous and encouraging ages of the world."

Mr. Zeitlin states that Mr. Sherman's position as a critic is essentially a medium one between the conservative and the radical wings, more nearly central, perhaps, than that of any of his contemporaries.[1] Mr. Canby spoke of him as the great scholar critic. Professor Paul Shorey said that he was one of the best known critics of one of the largest newspapers. George DeMille wrote concerning Mr. Sherman as a critic:

> "Surveying the man on every side, considering this rare union of scholarship and life, of morality and openness of mind, his readiness to learn and grow--remembering his reasoning power, his vivacity of style, his Arnoldian keenness of insight, unique among living critics, I am inclined to call him the greatest of American literary critic since the death of James Huneker." 2.

These are only a few of the many estimates which might be given of Mr. Sherman as a critic.

Almost everyone will agree with Mr. Pattee concerning the early tragic death of Mr. Sherman when he says: "The death of Stuart Sherman in 1927 at the age of forty-six was a distinct loss to American criticism". 3.

1. Life and Letters Vol. 1, p. vll.
2. Sewanee Review.
3. The History of American Literature, Fred Lewis Pattee, ch. 20.

## THE WRITINGS OF MR. SHERMAN

It was Poe who said that every critic should be a poet. Both Arnold and Professor Sherman were poets and critics. Dr. Sherman wrote both poetry and prose. As a man of letters he made his first ventures in writing, in verse.

### VERSE

From the time Mr. Sherman entered Williams College, he started contributing poems to the Williams Weekly and Monthly which was called the "Lit." These poems were chiefly initiative and show the influence of poets whom he had been reading for instance, "Love's Parodox," a sonnet in the Elizabethan manner. "Gismonda," a ballad bearing the mark of Keats. "The Prayer of the Monk Eustace," is Tennysonian. He also composed love lyrics, some lightly sentimental, some more serious. "Her Roses Crown my Head" treats the age old theme of the victory of love over death. The best and most charming of these lyrics is "Flower Gathering."[1]

Mr. Sherman's friends and teachers were inclined to expect that he would gain distinction as a poet, and his own ambition was toward poetic achievement. His friend Professor Goddard, an associate of Mr. Sherman at Northwestern University writes this recollection of Mr. Sherman as a poet-teacher which is of interest here. He says:

> In his free moments, Stuart Sherman was one of the most romantically minded persons I have ever known. One of my earliest memories of him is that of pacing the shore of Lake Michigan while he read or chanted to me the lines of the sonnet; 'De Senectute' which

[1] Life and Letters. Vol. I, pp. 93 et seq.

> he had just written--he was in his middle twenties. On another occasion I came out of the bright daylight into his room on Orrington Avenue, with the sense that I had suddenly stepped into a cavern, all the shades were drawn down and he sat by a dim light composing poetry. In the course of the year he showed me many of his poems and I dare say others that I did not see."[1]

At his summer home at Dunewood, Mr. Sherman took great pleasure in writing many songs and verses for three little children, as he calls them in his verse "May-ree", "Mar-ga-ret" and "John-nee". (John-nee was his own son).

He wrote a children's story made up of these songs and verses, the title of which was:

> "How the Little Souls Saw the Sand Man with Other Surprising Adventures that Befell the Children in Dunewood." [2]

Mr. Sherman contributed verses to the Nation and the N.Y. Evening Post and Daily Illinois up through 1922.

He was especially delighted to be asked by Prof. Palmer to give the Phi Beta Kappa poem at the Harvard Commencement, "Redemption". (See Appendix II p.154).

Mr. Sherman felt that marriage was a stimulus to verse, but he also felt that he was forced to stifle his poetic expression in seeking to gain a bread and butter existence.

One can find much poetic feeling in Mr. Sherman's writings and he gives a sympathetic interpretation of poets as revealed in the essay "John Masefield", and "The Exoticism of John Synge".

1 Life & Letters, Vol. 1, p.142
2 Ibid. p. 294

## LETTERS

As a man of letters, Mr. Sherman took interest in the epistolary art. He was not interested in writing just plain facts, he put his whole personality into the letter. As a student at Williams College he wrote an essay entitled "Enditing Letters" ending in a glorification of Stevenson's letters. His friends agreed that he followed the theory which he wrote in this essay. He was very generous in writing letters to his friends, and students. Among his letters are those to Mr. Woodbridge, his friend, Mr. More, Mr. Babbitt, Mr. Carl Van Doren and to other critics also. Letters to his editors for example, Mr. Sedgwick of the Atlantic and Mr. Perkins of Scribners. As literary Editor there are many letters to his secretary, Garetta Buey and to his Editor Irita Van Doren. The loveliest letters, those revealing tenderness and sweet sentiment are to his mother and son.

## JOURNAL

From High School days when Mr. Grovenor B. Hill, a teacher at Williams High School awakened in Mr. Sherman a great love for reading as described in the essay "Shaping Men and Women," Mr. Sherman kept a notebook where he wrote down thoughts and quotations from his reading. There were six such notebooks. As a student at Harvard, however, Mr. Sherman refers only to his diary. As a professor he kept a Journal. The following comment which Mr. Sherman makes on Emerson's Journal in the essay "The Emersonian Liberation" applies equally to Mr. Sherman's own Journal.

## JOURNAL

He writes:

> ("At first he (Emerson) is much occupied with what he has read or proposes to read") "but presently his notebook becomes a kind of storehouse of mellowing the fruits of daily meditation and an experimental garden for planting the seeds of new thoughts gathered on his intellectual adventures--and they enrich greatly our sense of the personality behind them"[1]

In Mr. Sherman's Journal there are reflections and meditations on human nature, society and life in general mingled with thoughts on democracy. He asks questions and answers them and gives definitions of terms on questions of philosophy, religion, and art. There are maxims and epigrams and an Idea is polished to an aphoristic point, as in this instance. "I reached for a high truth and fetched it down and a great cluster of friendly thoughts". From these notebooks, diaries and Journal he drew material for his writings.

## HIS PROSE WRITINGS

His prose writing, aside from his letters and Journal include: Lectures, addresses, textbooks, editorials, book reviews, critical essays, and essays written for the Herald Tribune which Mr. Sherman called "Critical Chroniques".

[1]American "The Emersonian Literation".

## HIS PROSE WRITINGS

### ADDRESSES

Professor Sherman frequently lectured at various colleges and universities throughout the country and before various teacher's organizations. His addresses to the students at the University of Illinois, usually on Thanksgiving Day were "Toward an American Type", "The Shifting Centre of Morality" and "Vocation". Two of his most notable addresses were given at the University of Chicago. They are called the"William Vaughn Moody Lectures"; "Literature and the Government of Men", and "Points of View in American Criticism". Other outstanding addresses were "Shaping Men and Women" and "America and Allied Ideals" published in a pamphlet for the U. S. Government during the war of 1918. One of his last addresses was made before the Academy of Arts and Letters entitled "The Emotional Discovery of America". Mr. Sherman always wrote his lectures and addresses before delivering them. They are outstandingly fine essays, eloquent and inspiring.

### Editorials, Book Reviews and Critical Essays

The Editorials, Book Reviews and Critical Essays were written principally for the N. Y. Evening Post and the Nation. They were written sometime in the summer vacation or along with Prof. Sherman's teaching.

### ESSAYS

#### Critical Essays

As a literary critic the majority of Mr. Sherman's writings are critical essays. They are criticisms of the great men of letters including English, American, French and Irish writers and of their work, analyzing, explaining and interpreting them as a critic. There is a change in his essays written for the

## HIS PROSE WRITINGS

### Essays

New York Herald Tribune. They are criticism of the lesser writers as well as the great, and the essays are more informal. Three essays stand apart from these critical essays for their autobiographical interest: "Forty and Upwards"; "An Interview with a Newcomer in New York", and the essay "The Flavor of Time and Places" written for his son's magazine, "98.6".

All Mr. Sherman's essays appeared in magazines or journals. He contributed chiefly to the New York Evening Post, The Nation, The Atlantic Monthly, MacNaught's Magazine, "The Bookman", "The Saturday Review of Literature", the "New York Times", and "The New York Herald-Tribune".

### Miscellaneous Writings

His miscellaneous writings include philological articles, introductions to books, signed letters, pamphlets, and articles. He wrote introductions to the book "American Prose Masters"; to the Gustav-Sand Flaubert Letters and to the History of American Literature.

### Books
### Textbooks

As a Professor of English, Mr. Sherman wrote textbooks on Whitman, Emerson, Arnold, a book of short stories and others, chiefly for undergraduates but are of interest to the most scholarly readers. Among the notes of the book of short stories is a remarkable description of the writers and their work.

### Books

Mr. Sherman's books are made up of essays (previously

published in magazines or journals) introductions taken both from books which he himself edited and those edited by others, and addresses.

Mr. Sherman so identifies himself with his writings, making himself at one with the subject that they are a reflection of the author himself, of his personality, wisdom, scholarship, high seriousness,purposefulness, his wit and humor. The content of the books are rich in thought and feeling. They reflect his love of literature both of books and of writing and his wide interest in the field of literature, literary criticism, in the younger generation in education, democracy, and American Ideals, and his love for humanity. It is the prestige of his personality which make his books enjoyable to read.

The purpose of his writing is indicated by one of his definitions of style, - a vehicle for carrying ideas - and the essay form which Mr. Sherman uses has been the form for popularizing ideas for centuries. It was characteristic of Mr. Sherman as a writer to have a purpose for everything he wrote. He states the purpose in publishing books either in an introduction or preface. In the book" On Contemporary Literature" it was to advance the idea of"Humanism"as opposed to "Naturalism", and he judged the authors according to the standpoint of the humanists. The essays included were revised to conform to the thesis of the book. The purpose of the book "Americans" was to strengthen our nationalism, after the war - 1918. His ideas of the Puritan tradition and the modern spirit are interpolated in the various essays of

PROSE WRITINGS
Books

famous Americans such as Franklin, Emerson, Hawthorne, Whitman and others. The purpose in publishing the book The Genius of America was to find where culture was centered in America, to find where the creative stream of energy, the formative spirit, the modern spirit is found. It contains the well known essays,"The Genius of America", "What is a Puritan", "Tradition", and "Literature and the Government of Men". It is considered a controversial book. The book "Points of View" as Mr. Sherman states very graciously in the Preface was to speak his thoughts aloud about the miscellaneous collection of essays which he had gathered together from their various sources as a courtesy to the reader. The purpose of the book My Dear Cornelia was to write essays for the younger generation on subjects which concern them, such as religion, morality, chastity, sex, marriage and happiness. The last book which Mr. Sherman as literary editor published was the volume Critical Woodcuts. Again he states his purpose that it was written as an annual chronicle which will constitute a picture of his age and its tendencies.

In the essays themselves he frequently informs the reader of his purpose in writing the essay and the significance of what he is writing as if he were instructing his students.

Such titles as "Literature and the Government of Men," "The Genius of America", "What is a Puritan", "For the Higher Study of American Literature" and many others, would indicate the high seriousness of an author who wrote "no man can write anything who does not think that what he writes is the history of the world". Further, Mr. Sherman stated, that he was not interested in writing unless he could make a change. In such essays to select a few as "The Shifting Center of Morality"

## PROSE WRITINGS
### Books

"English and the Graduate Schools", "Professor Kittridge and the Teaching of English", "Education for the People", "The Genius of America","Tradition", "Mr. Mencken, The Jeune Fille and Literature", are evidence that Mr. Sherman sought to build up the morality of the younger generation, to improve English instruction in colleges, to foster democratic ideas, to raise the level of culture, and to combat the rising tide of vulgarism in America.

Inasmuch as Mr. Sherman's chief purpose in writing was to convey ideas, his principal object was to make his writings interesting as well as informing. As a Professor, he wrote largely for a college audience, but as a journalist for a cosmopolitan audience. He sought to include interesting facts and tell them in an interesting manner to suit both audiences. That is why he has been called a combination of both"highbrow" and "lowbrow". In the field of literary criticism, he felt the literary criticism of his day was lacking in personality. He endeavored to make criticism more personal, to liven it up, to make it more interesting to read. He combines fiction with it and introduces conversation between characters to convey the main ideas. Sometimes it is just a dialogue between two characters as in "The Conversation with Ostriches"; "An Interview with a Newcomer in New York", "My Dear Cornelia", "The Genius of America", and "Toward an American Type". In "My Dear Cornelia", there is conversation carried on by four persons in the episode of "Cornelia and Dionysus".

## PROSE WRITINGS
### Books

Aside from their content the essays are of excellent literary quality. Mr. Sherman is skilled in the art of rhetoric. Many figures of speech are used; similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, analogies, epigrams, aphorisms and definitions. The sentence structure is varied; the diction is chosen with discrimination, the ideas are well organized. There are balanced sentences, antitheses, rhetorical questions, adjectives and verbs in a series for vividness or emphasis. Some paragraphs are made up of a great many statements of fact set off by semicolons.

There is much beauty in much of Mr. Sherman's prose, some passages rising to the level of poetry. In Portrait Medallions there is much poetic fancy and impressionistic writing. There is much beauty found in Mr. Sherman's prose in the use of figures, symbols, images, colors in words, in description, and in his portraits as illustrated in the portraits of Disraeli, H. G. Wells, Montaigne and Barret Wendell, found in these selections. He has the power of giving these portraits vitality and life. There is humor in many of his essays, especially those written while he was literary editor. There is irony and satire especially in the essays in the volume On Contemporary Literature. There is a refreshing quality in many of his essays. There are many emotional passages as seen in the essay "The Emotional Discovery of America" and "Shaping Men and Women". Many of his essays have a dramatic quality.

PROSE WRITINGS
Books

His essays are of excellent literary quality because of their accomplished style, because of their beauty and clarity of expression. He writes in all these essays as if he were addressing just one person in a friendly confidential manner. This does not apply to his controversial essays. Every born man of letters says Mr. Sherman, speaking of Henry James, has a half a dozen styles. This is true of Mr. Sherman also, as will be illustrated in the selections. Turning to his essay "American Style", we find this further comment on style. He says the first distinctive American style may be said to begin with Emerson's first essay on nature, of which the gist is "discoverer become and express yourselves and nothing but yourselves". In another passage he says:

> "In a sense the theory is found, that everyone has a style, since style, broadly speaking, is only a comprehensive term for the effect conveyed through all the various means by which a man reveals that he is himself and not someone else." Again, he says, "when a man gives himself away by everything he is and says and does, we say that he has a personality, meaning a distinctive personality. When such a personality happening to be a writer marks his diction, his images, his ideas, point of view and temper as unmistakably belonging to him, he says that he has a style, meaning a distinctive style".[1]

In all these respects, Mr. Sherman has a distinctive style which is his gusto.

His style is on different levels according to the subject. As a journalist, he uses at times colloquial and lowbrow expressions. Mr. Sherman averred he had to whitewash his style for democracy. Mr. Sherman's style is confluent with the matter,, and it varies according to the mood of the writer. They may be

[1] Points of View, "American Style", p.164.

PROSE WRITINGS
Books

witty, humorous, satirical, ironical, full of raillery, forceful, militant, lively, vigorous, dignified, quiet, formal or informal. They are written with gusto and enthusiasm. The question of taste often arises, but on the whole the writer feels that Mr. Sherman is an artist with a love for the beautiful, a great writer and a man of letters.

Mr. Beach says that Mr. Sherman has the same gusto as Mr. Mencken, and it is the quality of gusto which makes writing live. According to Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, "His writings are inseparable from the critic. They will live and be outstanding as he has taken his place among the critics for his interest in literature and literary criticism."[1] Carl Van Doren said that he was the ablest writer among his contemporaries. Quoting Mr. Sherman: "It must be a gesture of giving to contribute to the joy and beauty of the world," and he gave himself to the world through his writings.

[1] America Coming of Age

Mr. Sherman's Books
A Chronological Table*

1911 "Stevenson's Treasure Island," New York: Henry Holt and Co. Introduction, pp.vii-xlv;text; notes and comment,pp.241-58. (Out of print)

1912 "The Tragedy of Coriolanus" (The Tudor Shakespeare).New York: The Macmillan Company. Introduction, pp.vii-xxii;text; notes and glossary, 169-191.

1914 "A Book of Short Stories" (English Readings for Schools). New York: Henry Holt and Company. Introduction, vii-xxiv; text; notes and comment, 305-53.

1915 "'Tis Pity She's a Whore and The Broken Heart," by John Ford. Boston and London: D. C. Heath & Co. Introduction, v-lv; text; notes, bibliography and glossary, 271-87.

1917 "Cambridge History of American Literature," Volume 1. (Co-editor with W. P. Trent, John Erskine, and Carl Van Doren). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. Writer of Preface,pp.iii-xi; Chapter 6: "Benjamin Franklin," and Bibliography, pp.442-52.

1917 "Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him." Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company. 326 pp.

1917 "On Contemporary Literature," New York: Henry Holt & Co. 312 pp. (3 editions)

1921 "Cambridge History of American Literature" (Co-editor with W. P. Trent, John Erskine, and Carl Van Doren),Volumes III and IV. Writer of "Mark Twain," Vol. III, Chap.1.

1921 "Essays and Poems of Emerson," New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. Introduction, vii-xlv. Reprinted as "The Emersonian Liberation" in "Americans," 63-121.

1922 "Americans". New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Preface, pp.vii-xiii. Text, 336 pp. (Reviews in Great Britain).

1923 "The Genius of America." New York:Charles Scribner's Sons. 269 pp.

1924 "Men of Letters of the British Isles." Portrait Medallions From the Life by Theodore Spicer-Simson with Critical Essays by Stuart P. Sherman and a Preface by G. F. Hill. New York: William Edwin Rudge. 133 pp.

1924 "My Dear Cornelia." Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press. 281 pp.

1924 "Points of View." New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 363 pp.

* Bibliography taken from Life and Letters,vol.II,813-853.

Mr. Sherman's Books
A Chronological Table

1925 "Letters to a Lady in the Country." Together with Her Replies. By Paul and Caroline. With an Introduction by Stuart Sherman. New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons. Introduction, pp. v-xiii. 332 pp. (In collaboration with Garreta Busy.)

1926 "Critical Woodcuts...Illustrated with Portraits Engraved on Wood by Bertrand Zadig." New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons. Introductory, pp.xi-xiv;348 pp. (Reviews in Great Britain)

1927 "The Main Stream," New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons. Introduction (excerpted from Introduction to "Critical Woodcuts"), vii-viii; 239 pp. (English Reviews)

1928 "Shaping Men and Women. Essays on Literature and Life..." Edited by Jacob Zeitlin. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. Inc. Introduction,ix-xlv;277 pp.

# Chronology of the Life of Stuart Sherman

| | |
|---|---|
| 1881 | He was born at Anita, Iowa. |
| 1887 | His family moved to California. |
| 1892 | His father died. |
| 1894 | Stuart started out with the Hubbs family for Arizona. His career as a gold miner lasted seven or eight months. |
| 1894 | At twelve, Stuart traveled across the continent alone to live with his mother at Dorset, Vt. |
| 1895 | He attended Troy Conference Academy at Poultney, Vt. |
| 1897 | His mother moved to Williamstowne. He entered the High School there. |
| 1899-1900 | Covers the period when he found himself in Books; his readings. |
| 1900 | He entered Williams College. |
| 1903 | He was editor of the Williams' College paper. At Commencement he wrote the class poem and was class orator. |
| 1903 | Mr. Sherman received a scholarship for graduate study at Harvard. |
| 1906 | He received his doctor's degree from Harvard. |
| 1906-1907 | He was instructor in English at Northwestern University. |
| 1906 | He married Ruth Mears, who received her degree of Master of Arts from Vassar in Chemistry. |
| 1907-1924 | He taught at the University of Illinois. |
| 1907 | John Mears Sherman was born. |
| 1908 | In the summer vacation he went to New York to be temporary editor of the Evening Post and the Nation. For ten years (continued on next page) |

he was virtually a staff contributor--his reviews and critical essays were regular and frequent.

1909 He was made Associate Professor at University of Illinois.

1909 The Shermans visited the Woodbridges in Colorado in the summer vacation.

1910 He toured throughout Great Britain with Carl Van Doren.

1910-11 He was made, as Professor, temporary Chairman of the English Department, University of Illinois. 5,200 students were enrolled in the 13 schools and colleges, 552 members on the Faculty roll.

1912 In the summer, the Faculty spent in the East--Sherman offered two courses in the Columbia summer session--writing for the Post and for Mr. More, editor of the Nation.

1913 The Shermans made their summer home at Durnewood on the shores of Lake Michigan.

1914 Sherman considered teaching at Amherst upon an invitation from Pres. Meiklejohne. He remained at Illinois however and became permanent head of the English Department.

1916 Mr. Sherman went on Sabbatical leave--he spent six months at Durnewood writing his book on Arnold, and six months in New York.

1917 War Time. Mr. Sherman returned to University of Illinois.

1917-21 The next four years he was at the height of his power as teacher and writer.

1920-21 He was on the Pulitzer Prize Committee--delivered two William Vaughn Wood Lectures in Chicago.

1921 In the summer, he taught at the University of California --delivered a Phi Beta Kappa Address at Leland Stanford--travelled at Southern end of State to meet Mrs. Joaquin Miller.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1921 | He returned to Illinois--then came the period of his controversial writings. |
| 1922 | He received the honorary degree of L.H.D. from Williams', his Alma Mater. |
| 1923 | Mr. Sherman was elected to become a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. |
| 1924 | He accepted the offer of Mr. Julian Morris to be editor of the New York Herald Tribune: Literary Supplement which Mr. Sherman named "Books". |
| 1924 | He wrote his resignation from Illinois to Dean K. C. Babcock--he delivered Phi Beta Kappa Address at Tulane University, Texas. |
| 1924 | In the summer, he traveled in Europe with Mrs.Sherman and John. |
| 1924 | He started his career as Literary Editor. His life in New York was very busy--visits to Art Museums--theatres--lectures and addresses in addition to his work. He became a member of the Century Club. |
| 1924 | Summer vacation at Durnewood. Before returning to New York, he visited his son who was convalescing at a sanitarium at Colorado Springs. |
| 1924 | He returned to New York to his new residence at 52 Janes Street. |
| 1925-6. | His life in New York was even more intense than previous years. Professor Pattee wished to name him for the Presidency of Penn. State College, which he declined. |
| | He was one of the judges on Committee for the Pulitzer Poetry Prize award--also served on Committee for the award of a prize for the best negro poetry, offered by Opportunity. |
| 1926 | In the summer, he traveled to Colorado Springs, to give lectures at Colorado College, and to be with John. A brief visit to Durnewood. |
| 1926 | On August 20th his death came like Shelley's, by drowning. |

# THE WRITINGS

# ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

TO

PAUL ELMER MORE

"Man must begin, know this, where nature ends."
Matthew Arnold

CONTENTS

Introduction
The Democracy of Mark Twain
The Utopian Naturalism of H. G. Wells
The Barbaric Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser
The Realism of Arnold Bennett
The Aesthetic Naturalism of George Moore
The Skepticism of Anatole France
The Exoticism of John Synge
The Complacent Toryism of Alfred Austin
The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James
The Humanism of George Meredith
Shakespeare, Our Contemporary

1917

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

"Man must begin, know this, where nature ends."[1]
Matthew Arnold

The volume is dedicated to Paul Elmer More. Mr. More was then Editor of The Nation. In acceptance of this tribute Mr. More wrote: "It would be a pleasure to receive the dedication of any book written in the spirit of your Introduction or, I might say written by you in any spirit."[2]

Mr. Sherman compiled the volume at the end of his Sabbatical year from the University of Illinois, during the period of the great war. He had just published the text-book Matthew Arnold and How to Know Him.

At the time of Mr. Sherman's writing for The Nation the publisher, Henry Holt wrote to Mr. Sherman:

> "'Such stuff as yours on Josiah Flynt and George Meredith in The Nation is too good to be lying around loose'", "and asking if he had enough to make a book".[3]

In a letter to Professor Irving Babbitt, however, Mr. Sherman tells of Mr. Holt's reluctance to publish the volume during war time. The letter also indicates the tremendous response which the volume brought forth all over the country upon its publication.

[1] Quotation on the Title Page
[2] Life and Letters, Vol. 1, p.323
[3] Ibid, p.184

> Mr. Henry Holt asks me to allay, if possible, the resentment of those who may inquire why Shakespeare has been smuggled, like a Joseph's cup, into the corn of a volume on contemporary literature. Shakespeare is here because I find him the most interesting and suggestive of living writers. His presence helps one to distinguish the values of his competitors. His humanism serves as a measure of the degrees of their naturalism. Reflective readers will perceive, I hope, that the object, if not the ostensible subject, of the essay on Shakespeare is also the object of the essays on Mr. Wells, for example, and Mr. Dreiser and Mr. George More.

It will be noted in the Table of Contents that each essay contains an "ism", Mr. Sherman writes to Mr. More that this is deliberate and that it is explained to some extent in the introduction.

There is a long Introduction, a Prologue to the critical essays; it is fine literature, stating clearly and vehemently, the doctrine of the "humanists" as opposed to that of the "naturalists", and also his purpose to judge the authors according to the standards of the "humanists"--as one critic puts it judged according to the standards of Matthew Arnold.

The essays on Theodore Dreiser, H. G. Wells, George More, and John Synge bear the brunt of the "naturalist" attack. Whereas the essays "Arnold Bennett", "George Meredith", Henry James" and "Shakespeare" represent the "humanists" though they are on a different level of "humanism". Anatole France is called a "disheartened humanist."

The essay on <u>The Democracy of Mark Twain</u> forms a "significant individual strand in the texture of the humanistic web."

"Your letter about my book pleased me very much. You treated it indulgently; but after reading the Chicago papers, which with one accord went after it with their war paint on, I could stand a little indulgence. Henry Holt feared that if it were issued in war time it would fall 'dead from the press'--or at least he said so. It hasn't fallen dead by any means. From Baltimore to San Francisco the chorus of indolent reviewers has given it paragraphs enough, in which you and More come in for your share of attention."[1]

"Mr. Sherman devoted a good portion of the summer months of 1917 to the revision of these essays and to writing the Introduction. Many of the changes are made from purely stylistic motives, to a greater concreteness to the expression, to improve the rhythm and to clinch an idea vividly by means of an image.

"This sort of manipulation" says Mr. Zeitlin, "is evidence that Mr. Sherman never wearied in the effort to bring his writings to as fine a point as it would bear. He continued in this attention to detail till the end."[2]

Mr. Sherman's letters to the publisher throw much interesting light on the volume, and also explain his reason for including the Shakespeare essay in a volume of Contemporary Literature, the inclusion of which might shock the average reader, and be considered by him poor taste. Furthermore, the justification of this inclusion was questioned by Henry Holt.

1 Life and Letters, vol. 1, p. 341
2 Ibid., pp. 327, 328

The following is a letter in answer to this charge:

> ". . . now in my scheme, the essay is an essential part of the exposition. The article is not a 'Tercentenary Address.' It is a more or less polemical drive at 'the naturalistic spirit' of our contemporaries over the body of Shakespeare; and I think it will be recognized as such by several critics of eminence.--Furthermore, I hold that Shakespeare is a contemporary and that he always will be--
>
> There was not on my part the slightest idea of chucking him into the volume to fill up. He was put in on business,--for the belligerent purpose which runs pretty straight through them all. The inclusion can easily be explained by a few lines in the Introduction, so that the reader will not feel that he has been dishonorably treated.[1]

In concluding the letter with reference to the pecuniary settlement of the volume Mr. Sherman writes: "And now that I offer you a volume containing the distilled results of ten years' hard reading and writing, I am to pay myself with 'glory.'"....[2]

In another letter to Mr. Holt Mr. Sherman concludes: "It has been my desire to put kick into the book and not about it."[3]

Mr. Sherman gives his reason for including the essay on the Poet Laureate, Alfred Austin, as well as the essay on Shakespeare, in the Preface:

> I have been accused of being a besotted "Victorian" --a kind of creature which ought to be extinct, very obnoxious to the younger critics, yet still so numerous as to constitute a not negligible element in the procession of our days. To give a certain color to the charge I have included an essay on Alfred Austin, whom I regard as the most amusing of the Victorian poets.

1 Life and Letters, vol. 1, p. 325
2 Ibid., p. 325
3 Ibid., p. 327

All the essays are alike in general, in that Mr. Sherman reviews and discusses the principal ideas of an author, as revealed both by his personality as seen through his life and works, and by an analysis of his works. He seeks always to find the purpose of the author and his "criticism of life." As a literary critic, he traces the sources of an author's ideas, and the influences upon him, making comparisons of one author to another. It is characteristic of Mr. Sherman to stress one theme throughout each essay as indicated in the title;--with Henry James, it is beauty; with George Meredith, the comic spirit; with Anotole France, it is his skepticism, etc. "One cannot read one of Mr. Sherman's critical essays without knowing all about an author," writes one critic.

The style of the writing in these critical essays is of an author very much interested and very well informed of his subject. They are scholarly and written with an air of authority. One critic writes in regard to these essays: "Criticism when weighted with authority, but not made heavy with pedanticism is a welcome delight to the lover of books."[1] Mr. Sherman takes the reader into his confidence; he writes as if for the reader alone. He carries the reader along with him not at a slow pace, but at an easy comfortable rhythm. Aside from the content, one takes pleasure in reading these essays, for the ideas are so ably presented, written in beautiful prose,--lucid clear expression illumined by the author's personality. The reader is made to feel his enthusiasm, his gusto, for which he is noted; the author makes his writings very much alive, and in many passages one notes his sensitivity as a poet.

[1] Life and Letters, vol. I, p. 334

Quotations from various critics taken from the Biography describe other qualities of the style of the volume and speak of its literary excellence in general.

"From most of the reviewers in New York the book on its appearance received a cordial welcome. There was wide recognition of its unusual qualities, approval of its central position and admiration of its literary excellence."[1]

Prof. Irving Babbitt speaks of its readableness:

> "It seems hard to get a hearing of any anti-naturalistic point of view these days, but if anybody can get it you will, for all your writing possesses in an unusual degree the prime virtue of readableness."[2]

Randolph Bourne, a critic from the opposite camp, Mr. Zeitlin writes:

> "was willing to grant to Sherman a mind that honestly tried to think things out--more than that, he detected, chiefly through the essay on Alfred Austin, an air of "potential originality" which made him hope that Sherman might yet be saved to the younger generation who needed his wit and pungency and formal skillfulness."[3]

Mr. Roger Montgomery in Reedy's Mirror March 10, 1918 although not approving ofMr. Sherman's strain upon "naturalism" commended the book to modernists for its point and faith, its wide reading, zest, humor and mastery of style.[4]

In the Yale Review Prof. Bliss Perry acclaimed it the most remarkable volume of critical essays which we have had for many a year.[5]

1 Life and Letters, vol. 1, p. 333
2 Ibid, p. 340
3 " p. 337
4 " p. 335
5 " p. 334

"Mr. More acknowledged the book with a letter of warmest appreciation, expressing confidence in the effect which it would produce by its brilliance, its contemporaniety and its satire."[1]

("Mr. More never failed in generosity toward Mr. Sherman and never tired in private conversation of proclaiming him one of the greatest critics and the most brilliant writer in America.")[1]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. 1, p. 341.

# ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

## Introduction

(This volume stands for the principles of the "Humanists" from a critical viewpoint)

The following selected passages illustrate the style and the literary quality of the prose in the Introduction:

> "It is in this spirit of tender humanity, that I write this prologue: to indicate the point of view from which I have been studying the tendencies in contemporary literature."

* * *

> "The victory of the allies should logically be reflected in literature exalting the vindicated 'law for man.'
>
> "Haunted by memories of the fiery ruin wrought by those who made lust and law alike in their decree, it (the victory of the allies) should not seek in nature for the order, stability, justice, gentleness and wisdom that only man has ever desired or sought to create. It should mirror a society more regardful of its ascertained values, more reverent of its fine traditions, more reluctant to take up with the notions of windy innovators. It should, in short, suggest in its own subtle way the desirability of continuing to work out in the world that ideal pattern which lies in the instructed and disciplined heart."

* * *

> "For what is truth, after all, asks the relativist but some definite person's impression at some definite point of view.". . . . "To know the truth it appears to me above all interesting and important to go behind the work and to discover the workman and his point of view. . . . . Knowing one's class is knowing one's place in the world, and 'knowing one's place in the world' is knowing one's relative value . . . . . To assist authors and readers in the process of self recognition and self appreciation is one of the pleasures of criticism."
>
> . . . ."And I am as certain as I can be of anything that God is a spirit who denies the validity of adopting the laws of the physical universe for the moral regiment of man."

Introduction

> "The great revolutionary task of nineteenth-century thinkers, to speak it briefly, was to put man into nature. The great task of twentieth-century thinkers is to get him out again--somehow to break the spell of those magically seductive cries, "Follow Nature," "Trust your instincts," "Back to Nature". We have trusted our instincts long enough to sound the depths of their treacherousness."

A paragraph composed of enumeration of details set off by semi-colons follows; this is one of the most characteristics of Mr. Sherman's writings. It is part of his art of condensation and intensification. These paragraphs might well be called "comprehensive paragraphs." This particular paragraph it will be noted has clauses introduced by repeating the adverb "when". Repetition is one of Mr. Sherman's common devices; it gives a rhythmical effect,and serves for emphasis and euphony.

> "We have followed nature to the last ditch and ditch water. In these days when the educator, returning from observation of the dog kennel with a treatise on animal behavior, thinks he has a real clue to the education of children; when the criminologist with a handful of cranial measurements imagines that he has solved the problem of evil; when the clergyman discovers the ethics of the spirit by meditating on the phagocytes in the blood; when the novelist returning from the zoological gardens wishes to revise the relations of the sexes so as to satisfy the average man's natural craving for three wives; when the statesman after due reflection on 'the survival of the fittest' feels justified in devouring his neighbors--in the presence of all these appeals to nature, we may wisely welcome any indication of a counter-revolution."

* * *

One of the prose passages,beautiful because of its figures, is found at the conclusion of a contrast between "Naturalist and "Humanist". The paragraph in part is as follows:

## Introduction

"In America the critical movement which opposes naturalism is not, if I understand it, distinctively religious but distinctively humanistic. It seeks not primarily to reclaim man for God but to reclaim him for civil society; not so much to fit him with wings as to persuade him to shed the horns and hoofs which he has been wearing in his long _après-midi d'un faune_. The humanist therefore requires no complex philosophical apparatus. . . . . Though he shun the metaphysical abyss and profess his inability to climb the steeps of mystical insight, he is at one with the saints in his clear perception of the eternal conflict between 'the law for things' and 'the law for man.' This is the rock upon which the humanist builds his house.

"In the natural world he discerns no genuine law of progress, no conservation of values, no unity of purpose, but brutal cross purposes, blind chance, and everlasting change.'. . . . . .

# ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

## The Complacent Toryism of Alfred Austin

(From a critical viewpoint, Mr. Sherman included this essay to prove that he was not the "besotted Victorian" he was accused of being)

This essay is written in a tone of derision and satire. Yet mingled with its satire is much charm and beauty, in its description of rural England of the Victorian period and in its poetical phrasing. Much of the beauty comes from the quotations from the works of Alfred Austin, which Mr. Sherman includes in his paragraphs, and from the prose with which Mr. Sherman carries out the lyric and poetic quality found in Mr. Austin's works. Much of the satire is in contrasting England as it is today and as Mr. Austin sees it. The following passages are selected for their satire and beauty. The essay opens in the light satiric style which is carried throughout the whole essay:

> "In a day when ancient manuscripts are opened and made to yield up misprized and forgotten geniuses, it is singular that no one seems to have discovered Mr. Alfred Austin. Fortune, who deals inscrutably with the reputation of poets, has apportioned him a unique destiny. To some she has given merit without fame; to others, fame without merit; to him alone, fame without being read. Both before and after he entered upon the laureateship, his works were considered inessential to salvation. But upon his assumption of the singing robes of Lord Tennyson, he stepped at one conspicuous stride into the hot sunlight of journalistic derision. His own long participation in conservative journalism as leader writer for the Standard contributed to the acrimonious hilarity of his reception. Liberal knives hitherto exercised against his politics were now for the first time fleshed in his poetry. Little Englanders, become for the nonce literary critics, collected all the hasty and unfiled lines in the lays of the 'hysterical Helot of Imperialism.' The merciless cartoonist elevated him to the ancient throne of Dullness and twined the Parnassian laurels about his girdle. The wits of the press undertook to commit him (continued on next page)

THE COMPLACENT TORYISM OF
ALFRED AUSTIN

with his peers, sagely debating whether to lodge him by copious Southey or elegant James Pye, or whether to bid Shadwell lie a shade nearer Flecknoe and make room for the newcomer by Colley Cibber. His name has thus become a household allusion; his works--who has read them? Here was surely a porridge to have killed a stouter poet than the Quarterly's martyr."

In speaking of Mr. Austin's Autobiography, Mr. Sherman writes: "This Little--did--I--wot runs like a silver thread throughout the Autobiography: Mr. Austin is the most spontaneous of poets." A few lines later he writes:

"As I have already intimated, a divine satisfaction with his own position, a bland unconsciousness of contemporary feeling and opinion--these are precisely the startling and notable traits of the Laureate's character. . . . . "Mr. Austin, though he wots it not, is the last minstrel of Toryism. . . . . The genial and versatile figure that he portrays full length before us he conceives as no mere longanimous minor poet but as a typical, if somewhat superior, gentleman of Albion to whom some celestial beneficence has accorded, besides the common excellencies of his class, the sacred gift of song."

* * *

"He came into the world with a few innate ideas, and has neither discarded nor added many since."

* * *

"Pigeons, poultry, and flowers, surrounding a territorial home, with background and foreground of deer park and wide spreading woodland--these constitute his central conception of Nature. . . . . These things the Laureate has sung with sweetness and sincerity both in prose and in verse--in Veronica's Garden, Haunts of Ancient Peace, and in many a lyric, vernal, aestival, autumnal, and hibernal."

THE COMPLACENT TORIES OF
ALFRED AUSTIN

"Nor has Mr. Austin confined hi self to groves and gardens. He has sung also of man and especially of woman, the occupants of territorial homes and of all the prejudices and sentiments that uphold and beautify them.'

After digressing on the modern woman, and the "emancipating" hubbub of the suffragette movement Mr. Sherman continues:

"He has sung on imperturbably, celebrating the Lucille, the Lora, the Maud of the midVictorian dream-- the fair and lissome English maiden blushing and trembling toward her lover and her lord with the reverence implanted in her unsunned bosom by God and Nature."

* * *

"I have made this review of Mr. Austin's leading ideas because it has been falsely rumored that he has none. . . . . In his system of ideas, furthermore, I can detect little that would have been repugnant to the sense of a country gentleman in the reign of Farmer George. . . . . That explains his 'unconquerable antipathy' to towns, mills, and manufactures, and at the same ti e his fondness for depicting Britannia leaning smilingly on her undrawn sword. That is why he hates and fears liberalism, and at the same time makes conservatism ridiculous by representing it as invincible. That is why his poems, if read, and his picture of happy England might loosen all the bricks in the pavements of Manchester and Liverpool. For the sentimental romantic Toryism of Mr. Austin is not so much dull as false; false and at the same time obsolete; obsolete but not yet old enough to have acquired an antiquarian interest."

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

The Utopian Naturalism of H. G. Wells*

There is much satire in this essay on H. G. Wells. In the revision of the essay Mr. Sherman divided the essay into two parts [Before the War] and [Since the War]. In the first part, Mr. Sherman considers the comparison which Mr. Van Wyck Brooks had made of H. G. Wells to Arnold. He thinks however a better comparison would be not to Arnold but to Shelley. He says: "I have denied him the rank of a Victorian critic only that I might elevate him to the rank of a Georgian angel."

Mr. Sherman makes a comparison of H. G. Wells to Arnold to prove his statement. The two passages following concern his comparison with respect to their religion.

> "The defect in Wells's religion which distinguishes it from the religion of Arnold is exactly the defect in his morality, namely, the lack of any principle of control. . . . . .For Arnold, the men of true religous insight are Jesus, Marcus Aurelius, St. Francis, the author of the Imitations, Spinoza, who all consent together that 'the Kingdom of God is within you.'". . . . . .Now, did Mr. Wells possess not the insight of the religious sages, but just the sober human experience of a pagan like Horace, he would know that though all men entered his earthly paradise of lacquered ceilings, white-tiled bathrooms, Turkey rugs, scientific kitchens, motor-boats, limousines, and Victrolas, still in their poor worm-infested breasts would dwell 'black care,' still would they remain spiritual guttersnipes in their scientific Elysium. And if Mr. Wells consulted Arnold or the spiritual physicians who have effectually prescribed for the essential malady of living, he would be told that inner serenity springs from self-collection, self-control, and, above all, from the Hebraic sense of personal righteousness, which is the beginning of religious wisdom."

*As literary editor, Mr. Sherman changes his viewpoint on H. G. Wells.

The Utopian Naturalism of H. G. Wells
/Since the War/

Mr. Sherman continues to portray H. G. Wells in the following passages:

> "There is what I have called (quoting a passage from Mr. Wells) the unrealistic and Shelleyan emotional tendency in the prophet of the Younger Generation. Now hear Mr. Wells's realistic and disillusioning comment upon that tendency: (He quotes another passage of Mr. Wells)
>
> * * *
>
> "He is still the grandiose and romantic dreamer bent upon bringing forward a brand-new scheme for the salvation of the world. . . . . A few years ago it was world socialism, a little later it was world aristocracy--today it is world theocracy what it will be tomorrow no man knows, but every man can guess it will be something different and equally evanescent." Every reflecting man can guess this, because the problem which Mr. Wells sets himself is insoluable to the point of absurdity, namely the establishment of a government of the world by anarchists."

The following passage is taken in part from the conclusion:

> "His passion for dynamiting his own rear and sallying out on that long march with only his "personal luggage" betokens not an intellectual leader but an intellectual madcap. It is a fine feather in the bonnet of a writer of naturalistic fiction to create and bring out between novels a perfectly new divinity, and one so amiable as the Invisible King. But I, for one, find that his prophecy of the kinddom of this pleasant Utopia has only given me a particular relish for rereading the ninetieth and the ninety-first Psalms."

The Utopian Naturalism of H. G. Wells
(Since the War)

Mr. Sherman has been discussing the novel Mr. Britling Sees It Through. There follows an outstandingly fine character sketch of H. G. Wells:

"The masterpiece is of course Mr. Britling, who is transparently Mr. Wells himself, portrayed with unprecedented frankness. Most of his important portrait-painting is done from the same model, but his practiced hand has never before produced so engaging a likeness of himself. I am not speaking of his private life, of which I know nothing, but of his ideas, his sympathies, his character as a man of letters. What one enjoys in Mr. Wells is his curiosity, his vivacity, his hopefulness, his oright eagerness to clasp the wide universe in one heart-satisfying embrace. What one deplores in him is his hodgepodge of sex and politics, his passion for chimeras, his habit of supping on the east wind, his unwillingness to grow up at last and cheerfully adjust himself to the generally recognized fact that there is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Aspiring, visionary, and diffuse, he makes himself adored by radicals of one-and-twenty and by middle-aged women with imaginations unappeased by experience. But he disappoints those who expect an intellectual leader to find his own center, make up his mind, and come to conclusions. To those who look for fruit in the fall of the year he offers a new crop of blossoms. He had made a god of 'becoming.' His intellectual fluency and versatility have been his undoing, giving him ever the appearance of an unstable, an unformed power, a nebulous nucleus of dissolving impulses. Mr. Chesterton once remarked that one can hear Mr. Wells growing overnight. The war has been a long and a formative night, and Mr. Wells has come out of it with one book which can stand the light of common day. The fact is, apparently, that he has at last, to borrow his own figure, 'felt in his skin' what he has only been dreaming about for the last quarter of a century. He has felt in his skin what is wrong with the world."

# ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

## The Democracy of Mark Twain

(From a critical viewpoint, Mr. Sherman included this essay to reaffirm his sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the plain man.)

The essay The Democracy of Mark Twain is written with gusto as will be noted in the following passages; and as in many of his critical essays, Mr. Sherman stresses the thought of the title. In the following passages will be noted: his enumeration of qualifying adjectives to describe the character of Mark Twain; the use of balanced sentences, and antithesis; clear statements, epigrams, definitions, fine phrasing and all that makes for excellent prose. The inclusion of anecdotes from Mark Twain's life, direct quotations from Mark Twain and quotations from his books contribute much to the humor of the essay. The essay begins:

> "Anyone who has thought of Mark Twain merely as the author of many books may well be recommended to make his acquaintance as a puissant American personality through the three thick volumes of Mr. Paine's biography. As an inducement to that considerable undertaking I record here the experience of a reader who approached the enterprise with a distinct apprehension that he would be overtaken by fatigue before he emerged from the two-hundred-and ninety-sixth chapter and plunged into the twenty-four appendices." . . . . .

* * *

> "No American writer has ever enjoyed a more purely democratic reputation than Mark Twain.

* * *

> "What endears a public man to us is what he has in common with us--not his occasional super-emminences.

* * *

The Democracy of Mark Twain

"It does not damage Mark Twain with his constituency to say that there was not a drop of the aristocratic in his veins."

* * *

"He was not like some more exquisite men of letters, a democrat in his study and a snob in his drawing room; he was of the people and for the people at all times."

* * *

In reviewing Mark Twain's life Mr. Sherman writes:

"Three or four years after the Civil War he had begun to throw off books as a comet throws off meteors. Then he took up the burdens of a publisher, bargained with General Grant for his memoirs, and sold a quarter of a million copies where the other bidder had planned for a sale of five or ten thousand. His imagination took fire at a dream of magnificent wealth, and he became a great speculator, and in one year invested $100,000 in projects, and sank a fortune in an unperfected type-setting machine, and went into bankruptcy. Then, at the age of sixty he girded himself anew and made another fortune in three years and repaid his creditors to the last dollar, and in a few years more had accumulated a third fortune for himself, and drew annual royalties equal to the salary of the President of the United States, and built himself splendid mansions, and rested from his labors on an Italian mahogany bed, clad in a dressing-gown of Persian silk. Then the University of Oxford summoned the printer, pilot, miner, reporter, traveler, lecturer, author, publisher, capitalist across the sea, and robed him in scarlet, and made him a Doctor of Letters, and he retired into unofficial public life till, in 1910, the call came to set his course toward the sinking sun."

* * *

"No one recognized more freely than Mark Twain that in a sense he was a raider from the border. He never pretended to be the thing that he was not, and, on the other hand, he was never ashamed of the thing that he was."

The Democracy of Mark Twain

"The Brahmins, correctly enough, looked upon Mark Twain, and will continue to look upon him, as a robust frontiersman, produced in the remote Jacksonian era, carrying into the courts of Kings the broad laughter of the plains, and representing an Americanthat, for them, is already historical and almost fabulous. But they should no more condescend to this Herculean humorist than to any other epic hero; they should accept him heartily as they accept Robin Hood and Charlemagne, the wily Odysseus and Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London."

* * *

"Fond of strong language, careless of peccadilloes, tolerant of human frailities though he was, his feet were 'mortised and tenoned' in domestic rectitude and common morality.". . .

* * *

"The books in which he draws upon his life in the West —....one accepts them and rejoices in them as one accepts a bluff on the Mississippi or as one rejoices in a pine tree in a red spur of the Rockies."

With regard to Mark Twain's books of travel Mr. Sherman concludes:

"The Mississippi pilot homely, naive, arrogantly candid, refuses to sink his identity in the object contemplated--that as Corporal Nym would have said is the humor of it."

* * *

"Mark Twain's laughter is burly not fine, broad not profound; and in his earlier works national not universal."

* * *

Speaking of Mark Twain's religion he writes:

"In religion, Twain appeared to be a mugwump, or, more classically speaking, an agnostic over whom had fallen the shadow of Robert Ingersoll of pious memory. The irreligion of that generation is touched with a raw, philistine rationalism, but is thoroughly honest. Like

The Democracy of Mark Twain

all Americans, the author of Tom Sawyer received his religious culture in the Sunday-school, but stumbled over the book of Genesis and kindred difficulties, and was "emancipated." The loss of faith which, in certain conditions, is a terrible bereavement, was to him a blessed relief; when the God of the old-fashioned Sunday-school and the camp meeting ceases to terrify, he ordinarily becomes a deadly bore. Having never known the magnificent poetry of faith, he never felt the magnificent melancholy of unbelief. His experience was typical, however, and his very unspirituality was social. In his examination of Christian Science, he admitted that every man is entitled to his own favorite brand of insanity, and insisted that he himself was as insane as anybody. That was enough to assure most of us that he was sound on 'all essentials.'"

* * *

. . . "When Mark Twain died, we said with one voice 'he was an American.'"

* * *

"The American is a man of destiny. His word and deed flow inevitably out of the American Character. On the one hand he does a thing because it is right; on the other hand the thing is right because he does it. Revising the thought of Henry Fifth we may say, nice customs courtsey to great Americans."

* * *

"Not by his subtlety nor his death nor his elevation, but by his unflinching assertion of the ordinary self and the ordinary American the divine average did Mark Twain become as some critics are now calling him our foremost man of letters."

* * *

There is a postscript to the essay in which Mr. Sherman analyses "The Mysterious Stranger." The following passage is the conclusion of the first part.

It is characteristic of Mr. Sherman to state what an

author contributes to humanity which he does in this fine passage.

> "Mark Twain does not give us much help toward realizing our best selves; but he is a rock of refuge when the ordinary self--'the divine average' is in danger. As someone has said, 'We cannot live always on the cold heights of the sublime--the thin air stifles.' We cannot flush always with the high ardor of the signers of the Declaration, nor remain at the level of the address at Gettysburg, nor cry continually, 'O Beautiful! My country!' Yet, in the long dull interspaces between these sacred moments we need some one to remind us that we are a nation. For in the dead vast and middle of the years insidious foes are stirring--anaemic refinements, cosmopolitan decadencies, Teutonic heresies, imperial lusts, fraud and corruption, the cold sickening of the heart at reiterated expressions of unfaith in the outcome of the democratic experiment. When our countrymen migrate because we have no kings or castles, we are thankful to any one who will tell us what we can count on. When they complain that our soil lacks the humanity essential to great literature, we are grateful even for the firing of a national joke heard round the world. And when Mark Twain, robust, big-hearted, gifted with the divine power to use words, makes us all laugh together,, builds true romances with prairie fire and Western clay, and shows us that we are at one on all the main points, we feel that he has been appointed by Providence to see to it that the precious ordinary self of the Republic shall suffer no harm."

# ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

## The Barbaric Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser *

(From a critical viewpoint, this essay opens the attack on naturalism)

This essay is one of the most brutally satiric of Mr. Sherman's writings. He speaks of the novels of Mr. Dreiser as being founded on the jungle-motive; he speaks of his theory of animal-behaviour; of his Trilogy of Desire; of his chemical formula. He gives a whole paragraph of quotations from Mr. Dreiser's novels to make his statements convincing; it is also humorous.

> "By similar devices Mr. Dreiser drives home the great truth that man is essentially an animal, impelled by temperament, instinct, physics, chemistry--anything you please that is irrational and uncontrollable. Sometimes he writes an 'editorial' paragraph in which the laws of human life are explained by reference to the behavior of certain protozoa or by reference to a squid and a lobster fighting in an aquarium. His heroes and heroines have 'cat-like eyes,' 'feline grace,' 'sinuous strides,' 'eyes and jaws which vary from those of the tiger, lynx, and bear to those of the fox, the tolerant mastiff, and the surly bulldog.' One hero and his mistress are said to 'have run together temperamentally like two leopards.' The lady in question, admiring the large rapacity of her mate, exclaims playfully: 'Oh, you big tiger! You great, big lion! Boo!' Courtship as presented in these novels is after the manner of beasts in the jungle. Mr. Dreiser's leonine men but circle once or twice about their prey, and spring and pounce; and the struggle is over. A pure-minded serving-maid, who is suddenly held up in the hall by a 'hairy, exiomatic' guest and 'masterfully' kissed upon the lips, may for an instant be 'horrified, stunned, like a bird in the grasp of a cat.' But we are always assured that 'through it all something tremendously vital and insistent' will be speaking to her, and in the end she will not resist the urge of the elan vital . . . . . 'The psychology of the human animal, when confronted by these tangles, these ripping tides of the heart,' says the author of The Titan, has little to do with so-called reason or logic.' . . . . . "She was an unstable chemical compound.'"

Such is the Dreiserian philosophy.

Footnote:*Mr. Sherman changes his viewpoint on Dreiser in an essay in Critical Woodcuts.

The Barbaric Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser

He reiterates the jungle-motive in many other passages:

"Each book with its bewildering mass of detail is a ferocious argument in behalf of a few brutal generalizations."

In comparing Mr. Dreiser to George Eliot or Thackeray or Trollope or Meredith he concludes: "Mr. Dreiser sinks supinely back upon the law of the jungle or mutters his mystical gibberish about an alteration of the chemical formula."

* * *

"Mr. Dreiser's stubborn insistence upon the jungle-motive results in a dreary monotony in the form and substance of his novels."

After analyzing the novel The Financier he writes:

"In The Financier he 'documents' these truths about Cowperwood in seventy-four chapters, in each of which he shows us how his hero made money or how he captivated women in Philadelphia. Not satisfied with the demonstration, he returns to the same thesis in The Titan, . . . He promises us a third volume, in which we shall no doubt learn in a work of sixty or seventy chapters--a sort of huge club-sandwich composed of slices of business alternating with erotic episodes--how Frank Cowperwood made money and captivated women in London."

* * *

"The unreality of the whole transaction shrieks."

The conclusion is refreshing:

"A naturalistic novel is a representation based upon a theory of animal behavior. Since a theory of animal behavior can never be an adequate basis for a representation of the life of man in contemporary society, such a representation is an artistic blunder. When half the world attempts to assert such a theory, the other half rises in battle. And so one turns with relief from Mr. Drieser's novels to the morning papers."

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

The Exoticism of John Synge

/From a critical viewpoint, Mr. Sherman opposed the main tendency of Synge's writings./

The Exoticism of John Synge, "Literary Vagabond" is one of the most scholarly as well as one of the most beautiful essays in the book. In the essay, Mr. Sherman gives us portraits of Synge from various critics; the nature of his literary talent; and his reason for "tarrying" on Synge. In tracing the influences upon Synge, Mr. Sherman reveals his knowledge of French literature. In the interpretation and analysis of his works he is "at one" with the poet in the poetic phrasing and in the rhythmic cadence of the prose. Among the following passages illustrating the poetic quality of the prose, will be noted especially the phrasing in describing the poet's style and the phrasing in the summary of his works. After giving five portraits of John Synge, Mr. Sherman writes:

> "Now what we know of Synge's life makes it not wholly fanciful to read in these faces a brief extract of his personality with his vagrant yearnings, his homeless laughter, his facility in disguises; his love of the picturesque and strange, and his deep-seated melancholy and despair."

The following passages concern Mr. Synge's verse:

> "The poems are due to the influence of various masters. . . . . Mr. Synge's verse is what we should expect of a rather despondent young Bohemian, unsure of himself and seeking among other poets, foods and forms for his melancholy. . . . . .In the poem 'To the Oaks of Glencree' again we notice how Maistre Villon helps him shape and round out the first pure impulse of lyric exultation."

"Here are the peculiar marks of Synge himself--the irresistibly quaint idiom, the drifting rhythm, the loose sentence structure, thought thrown out after thought, as it were, without premeditation, and blossoming from phrase to phrase, the window opened upon a mist of vague and limitless emotion, the poignant and adorable Celtic wistfulness; while, as a matter of fact, these lines are a tolerably close translation of Leopardi's 'Silva.' We are here in the presence of a pure miracle of that style which is Synge's special creation, and which distinguishes him not merely from Leopardi, but also from all his Anglo-Irish contemporaries. With all its apparent spontaneity, his style is as patiently and cunningly wrought out as the style of Walter Pater--wrought of a scrupulously select vocabulary, idiom, and images, with an exacting ear controlling the cadence and shepherding the roving and dreamy phrases. With the aid of this perfected instrument he is able to appropriate and seal as his own poems from authors as diverse as Petrarch and Walter von der Vogelweide, Leopardi and Villon. This fact, taken together with his dependence in the original poems, tends to justify a search beneath the surface of his other work for alien forces secretly shaping his emotions and determining his forms."

* * *

"Synge's dramas are all sad, tragedies and comedies alike, because they are based upon a radical and hopeless disillusion. In them the native lyrical impulse, which in the poems we found checked by the cynicism of Villon, and which in the Aran Islands expanded under the influence of Loti, is again checked and controlled by the irony of Anatole France."

"Synge's comedies end in a kind of ironical bewilderment. His, indeed, is outlaw comedy with gypsy laughter coming from somewhere in the shrubbery by the roadside, pealing out against church and state, and man and wife, and all the ordinances of civil life.

It is not that many of the <u>dramatis personae</u> are vagrants, but that the dramatist himself is in secret heart a vagrant, and his inmost vision of felicity is purposeless vagabondage."

"What, then, shall we say of his tragedy? Those who are sealed of the tribe of Synge speak high praise of <u>The Riders to the Sea</u>, that picture of the drear old woman who has lost all her sons. . . . . Strictly speaking, <u>Riders to the Sea</u> is not a tragedy

at all, because it is not a drama. It might with more propriety be called a tragic idyl--a somber picture, impressive enough in its kind, with the fearful whispering of the young girls, whose necks have not yet bowed beneath the ancient burden, and the gray broken old mother, who looks before and after and has passed through all illusions, sitting there patiently, passively, receiving the tidings of disaster."

* * *

"Such, they tell us, is the atmosphere of Riders to the Sea. It is like Lear, it is like Greek tragedy; it is not, as they hasten to say--it is not like Maeterlinck's Home or The Intruder. Synge certainly does differ from Maeterlinck in two striking respects. While the Belgian 'mystic' deprives his persons of personality and locality and confers a kind of demonic personality upon death, the naturalistic Irishman steeps his lines in personality and the reek of the gray sky and the smell of the sea, and he represents death, in spite of the premonitions of Maurya, as only the old dark way of nature. But so far as what the Germans call the 'inner form' is concerned, Synge gives us simply an Irish Transposition of Maeterlinck."

## ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

### The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James

"This essay was previously published for the World's Best Literature. According to Mr. Zeitlin, Mr. Sherman in writing of Henry James surpassed anything he had done up to that time in the way of purely literary analysis and appreciation. A close friend of James, Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, who was with him during most of the last summer of his life, wrote to Sherman that his and Percy Lubbock's were the only interpretations which really got at the man. Mr. Bliss Perry and Mr. Frank Jewett Mather were quite carried away, the latter giving it as his opinion that a better critical essay might have been written in the last twenty years, but if so, he had not had the good luck to read it."[1]

"A writer in the New York Dial not otherwise friendly to Sherman's work, referred to this essay as the kind of aesthetic criticism that was needed in America."[2]

Mr. Sherman writes that Henry James is not an historian of manners, he is a trenchant idealistic critic of life from the aesthetic point of view.

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 318.
[2] Ibid., p. 319

He further analyzes Henry James:

"He adored beauty and nothing else in the world. He dotes-devoutedly dotes-in idolatry upon the enriched consciousness the general awareness and the physical loveliness of women.

He illustrates the aesthetic consciousness of Henry James with the following concrete figure:

"His special distinction among writers of prose fiction is in the exclusiveness of his consecration to beauty--a point which in this connection probably requires elucidation. To the religious consciousness all things are ultimately holy or unholy; to the moral consciousness all things are ultimately good or evil; to the scientific consciousness all things are ultimately true or not true; to Henry James all things are ultimately beautiful or ugly. In few men but fanatics and geniuses does any one type of consciousness hold undivided sway, and even among the geniuses and fanatics of the English race the pure aesthetic type was till Ruskin's time excessively rare. The normal English consciousness is, for purposes of judgment, a courthouse of several floors and courts, to each of which are distributed the cases proper to that jurisdiction. In the criticism of Matthew Arnold, for example, there are distinct courts for the adjudication of spiritual, ecclesiastical, moral, aesthetic, political, social, and scientific questions; but Ruskin handles all matters in the aesthetic chamber. In Shakespeare's criticism of life, to take the case of a creative artist, the discrimination of experience proceeds on clearly distinguishable levels of consciousness; the exquisite judgment of Sylvia--'holy, fair, and wise is she'--is a certificate of character from three distinct courts. But Henry James, on the contrary, received and attempts to judge all the kinds of his experience on the single crowded, swarming, humming level of the aesthetic consciousness; the apartments above and below are vacant."

In closing he writes:

"In almost every novel that he wrote he touched some woman or other with the soft breath of pure aesthetic adoration,--a refining and exalting emotion which is the note of Sherringham's relation to Miriam in <u>The Tragic Muse</u>;'Beauty was the principle of everything she did. . . . .

He quotes a passage from Henry James, then follows the conclusion which not only reveals his scholarship but his ardor for Henry James:

> "This is the 'very ecstasy of love;' and for this virtue, in the years to come, one adept after another reading the thirty or forty volumes of James which any one can read with ease and the fifteen or twenty richer volumes which demand closer application--for this virtue one adept after another, till a brave company gathers, is certain to say, ' I discriminate; but I adore him!'."

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

The Humanism of George Meredith

(From a critical viewpoint Mr. Sherman considered George Moore a disciple of Shakespeare in his humanism)

Mr. Zeitlin gives an anecdote for this essay: "In May of the year 1909," he says, "came a telegram from the editor of the Evening Post announcing that George Meredith had died and asking for an article immediately. Sherman was getting ready for a class. He rushed over to the University and wrote, "George Meredith is dead" on the blackboard, and for once cut a lecture to write an essay. In a short time, he produced the first of those brilliant pieces of literary analysis which gave notice that a critic of importance had arrived on the scene."[1]

The first of the two following passages defines the "comic spirit"--which is the theme which runs through this essay. The second passage is an outstanding paragraph of balanced sentences and antithesis.

> "To those who have read intelligently Meredith's Ideas of Comedy, I do not think it will seem an anticlimax to say that he believed the one thing needful, synthesis of all needs, was to instruct men in the proper uses of the comic spirit, that they might laugh and be laughed at unto their soul's salvation. For to him the comic spirit is a fine celestial sunlight in the mind, answering to the theological Grace of God in the heart, which preserves those into whom it passes from every evil thing. It is not hostile to prayer nor to labor nor to logic nor to truth nor to grandeur, but is very friendly to them all. It keeps prayer sweet, labor cheerful, logic sane, truth serviceable, and grandeur human. But over every form of animalism, egotism, sentimentalism, cowardice, and unreason, it will look humanely malign, and cast an oblique light on them, followed by showers of silvery laughter. For, to quote from the ode to the same beneficent

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. I, page 266.

spirit it is the

Sword of Common Sense!
Our surest gift: the sacred chain
Of man to man.

***

"In some of the poems", he writes, "the comic spirit becomes almost truculent in its glee."

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"The basic problems of contemporary literature are, for the thoughtful and responsible writer, manifold in appearance but in essence single: How to present a view of life both wise and brave, answering to experience as well as to desire, serviceable in art or in the daily walk. Single in essence, in appearance they are manifold: How to give pleasure without corrupting the heart, and how to give wisdom without chilling it. How to bring into play the great passions of men without unchaining the beast. How to believe in Darwin and the dignity of man. How to recognize the role of the nerves in human action without paralyzing the nerve of action. How to admit the weakness of man without dashing his heroism. How to see his acts and respect his intentions. How to renounce his superstitions and retain his faith. How to rebuke without despising him. How to reform society without rebelling against it. How to laugh at its follies without falling into contempt. How to believe that evil is fleeing forever before good, but will never be overtaken and slain. How to look back upon a thousand defeats, and yet cling to the fighting hope. If you will go through this list of questions you will not find one that Meredith does not answer or attempt to answer."

***

spirit it is the

Sword of Common Sense!
Our surest gift: the sacred chain
of man to man.

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"In some of the poems", he writes, "the comic spirit becomes almost truculent in its glee."

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"The basic

## ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

### Shakespeare, Our Contemporary

This essay is a comprehensive interpretation of Shakespeare's characters according to the humanist standpoint. Mr. Sherman (who believed that there was no question of time in the Republic of Letters) calls Shakespeare an Elizabethan humanist and speaks of the case of Elizabethan humanism. One especially interesting passage is Mr. Sherman's observation on the characters in life which serves as a contrast to the characters in Shakespeare's imaginary world:

> "In viewing the real world we frequently misunderstand the characters and motives of people who are very near to us, and we frequently miss the significance of important events which are taking place under our eyes. The grief of those we love is often inarticulate and unknown to us; passion sometimes gives no sign; hypocrisy wears its mask unpenetrated; and iniquity often goes not merely unpunished but undetected and even unsuspected to the grave. In partial or complete ignorance, even the wise and sensitive among us misplace their affection, their admiration, their compassion; and dull souls walk daily among tragic and comic friends and neighbors without a smile or a tear.
>
> In viewing Shakespeare's imaginary world, on the other hand, we are all constrained to see and to feel poignantly the emotional and moral significance of every character and every event. We follow the course of the great passions, which for us have no underground channels, from their inception to their catastrophic close. The lid of life is off. We gaze into the heart of all the crises. The bosoms of sinners have no secrets for us; we have attended them in each step that led to their <u>doloroso passo.</u> The just and the unjust man stand for us naked in their divers qualities, as we are told they shall stand in the Day of Judgment.

> There is not the least ambiguity in their appeal to our emotions or our judgment. The master of the spectable has bared to the last filament their characters, their motives, and their intentions; for Shakespeare's technique aims at delight not by the defeat but by the fulfilment of expectation. His figures are so placed, so contrasted, so lighted from within and from without--by soliloquy, aside, chorus, and direct speech and act--that our sympathies go right; go where he intended that they should go. If goodness and beauty are not always fortunate in the plot, they are invariably recognized and loved by the spectators. If the dramatis personae do not receive poetic justice in the play, they always receive it in the audience!

He concludes the essay with the following--one of Mr. Sherman's impressionistic and emotionally beautiful passages:

> "Though his vision of life extended to the depths beneath and to the heights above the reach and comprehension of man's mind, he dwelt habitually in that cleared and settled and spacious region of consciousness in which a man's thinking is right and his feelings are sure, in which the elementary human values are fixed, in which truth and goodness and beauty remain the same from age to age. He was to pass through times when literature would beat vain wings in the religious inane, and through times when it would sink in the naturalistic abyss; but he knew, he must have known, that whenever men returned from these aberrations to the wide sunlit human level they would find him their contemporary, they would come upon him in the midst of it, representing still with incomparable adequacy what can be seen from that point of view. Happy are they who dilligently seek for the center of that sunlit level, and thrice blessed they that find it."

He writes this essay with sincere admiration, and shows taste in his linking of every poet or novelist in the volume with Shakespeare.

# Americans

Excerpt from Preface.

An inflamed and egotistical nationalism appeared to me, as to so many others, the prime cause of the world's catastrophe.

And yet if even for a moment it occurred to me that true citizenship in "the country of all intelligent beings" might necessitate the sacrifice of one's essential Americanism and the use of the knife at the root of all fond sentiments related to it, in that instant there came to me, as if in a vision, our "divine mother" the spirit of America as the cleareyed among our poets and statesmen have seen her, assuring me that the higher piety demands no such immolation. That which we have loved in our country, she declared, that which we have honored in her, that which reveals her to our hearts as proudly beautiful is in no way dangerous to Humanity. On the contrary, the more deeply we loved the true constituent elements of her loveliness, the more clearly we understood her inmost purposes and set ourselves to further them, the more perfectly we should find ourselves in accord with the "friends of mankind" in all nations.

AMERICANS

TO

R.M.S.

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1924

# AMERICANS

The book Americans was published five years after the book On Contemporary Literature. The years intervening were filled with literary activity, editing books and writing critical essays, many of which are included in this book, The Genius of America, and Points of View. It is of interest to note that Mr. Sherman changed his publisher for this book and subsequent books to Charles Scribners Sons. Many of his letters are now written to Mr. Perkins of that publishing house, instead of to Mr. Holt.

He states his purpose,in the Preface,that of making Nationalism or Americanism stronger in order that Internationalism might be established, which would lead to peace in place of war. He has selected eminent Americans,chiefly writers, to represent the American ideals which are embodied in the ideas of the Puritan Tradition, the Modern Spirit in America and Democracy. The Preface is beautifully written in imaginative and poetic prose. The author alludes to a classic myth, the story of Aeneas who is about to kill Helen of Troy but is impeded by the interception of his divine mother, to serve as an analogy to his main theme.

One has only to look at the content of the book Americans to see what a wealth of material is here gathered in one volume representing the Spirit of America.

The essays on Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, Roosevelt, and the evolution of Henry Adams are biographies (most all of the essays include some biography). These are written with the insight of a critic into the ideas and policies of the men.

In the essay "Tradition" Mr. Sherman writes on the importance of tradition to great poets, novelists, and critics. "Tradition is important," he says "First of all because the great writer conceives of his vocation as the most magnificent and the most complex of crafts.--To him, them, the written tradition is a school and a museum in which, if he has a critical and inventive mind, he learns, from both the successes and the failures of his predecessors, how to set to work upon his own problems of expression."

Two essays stand apart from the other essays for their literary interest. The first is "Mr. Mencken, the Jeune Fille, and the New Spirit in Letters." The other is "The Imaginary Conversation with Mr. P. E. More."

In the first of these essays Mr. Mencken has written a satire. He has represented the new spirit in letters by the Jeune Fille. She becomes unsatisfied by the new spirit in letters and goes to the Mencken School for "aesthetic liberation."

The laughter is loud in this satire, and some of the figures are crude and banal--but Mr. Sherman is using the same weapons as Mr. Mencken.

Americans

Mr. Mencken, the Jeune Fille, and the
New Spirit in Letters

The book "Americans" opens with a clever satire on Mr. Mencken. Mr. Sherman livens up criticism on the new American literature. He represents the new swift civilization as the jeune fille who has everything to make her beautiful outside. "Sometimes," he says, "I imagine she wishes that her personal attendants, those handmen and maidens who have wrought so wonderfully with her surfaces, could be set at work upon her interior, so that her internal furnishing and decoration could be brought into measurable concord with the grace and truth of her contours, the rhythm of her hair.

"Imagine a thousand jeune filles thus wistful, and you have the conditions ready for the advent of a new critic."

"At this point enters at a hard gallop, spattered with mud, H. L. Mencken high in oath--thus justifying the Goethean maxim: Aller Anfang ist schwer. He leaps

from the saddle with sabre flashing, stables his horse in the church, shoots the priest, hangs the professors, exiles the Academy, burns the library and the university, and, amid the smoking ashes, erects a new school of criticism on modern German principles, which he traces through Spingarn to Goethe, but which the author would be inclined to trace rather to Eckermann."

He sets up a Menckenian Academy where the jeune fille pays for a copy of "Prejudices." He can give her lessons in derision, lessons in contempt, but she was mistress of all these when she entered his school.

.....The jeune fille says: "Where one has turned away from the false and soft and the silly, this is the question, where does one go to find true and beautiful things?"

While Mr. Mencken and the jeune fille are engaged in this chat on the nature of beauty, a high-powered automobile is heard from the street below the Menckenian school. "In bursts Mr. Francis Hackett looking like a man who has just performed a long and

difficult operation under the body of his car, though, as a matter of fact, he has only just completed a splashing, shirt sleeve review for the 'New Republic.' 'Let's wash up,' cries Mr. Hackett, stripping off his blouse of blue jeans, 'and go out to luncheon.'"

"Where shall we 'fressen'?" says Mr. Mencken.

"At the Loyal Order of United Hiberno-German-Anti-English-Americans," says Mr. Hackett. "All the New Critics will be there. Colum, Lewisohn, Wright, and the rest. I tried to get Philip Littell to come along. He's too gol darned refined. But I've got a chap in the car, from the West, that will please you. Used to run a column in the World's Greatest. Calls Thomas Arnold of Rugby 'that thrice-damned boor and noodle.'"

"Good!" Mr. Mencken exclaims. "A Menckenism! A Menckenism! A likely chap!" And out they both bolt.

The jeune fille strolls out and meets Mr. Littell. He is reading a book, on which the first snowflake of the year has fallen, and, as it falls, he looks up with such fine delight in his eye that she asks him what has pleased him.

"A thought," he replies gently, "phrased by a subtle writer and set in a charming essay by a famous critic. Listen: 'Ou il n'y a point de delicatesse,il n'y a point de litterature.'"

"That's a new one on me," says the jeune fille.

The other essay, "The Imaginary Conversation with P. E. More is a criticism of the "Shelburne Essays." It contains what Professor Shorey calls a "Comedia del 'Arte." It is good literary talk.

crpt:

"At Mr. More's home at Princeton on a Saturday evening three Torys, Mr. Holt, Mr. More and Mr. Trent meet together and are conversing about the wits of the coffee house included in the Shelburne Essays, when Dr. Johnson appears on the scene, and enters into the conversation.

Later in the evening--"Mr. More extinguishing the lights, sinks into his easy chair and watches for a time the flickers of his expiring fire, fingering the dusky folios while the Princeton chimes announce the midnight, and silence envelops that quaint little imitation English city----

"Mr. More is one of the last of the meditative men--the gossip and scandal of the evening's talk rise from his mind like a phantasmal smoke, in which the huge illusory bulk of Johnson appears but a whirling eddy in knee-buckles and the slighter form of Professor Trent, but a momentary shape in frock coat, floating wisp-like heavenwards."----

"A chill air pervades the still air of the study. Into the vacant chairs glide one by one the quiet ghosts of Henry More, the Platonist, and Sir Thomas Browne for whom Oblivion scattered her poppy in vain, and Cudworth rising from his tomb in "The true Intellectual System of the Universe," and pale Norris

of Bemmerton, wafted thither by a passion of loneliness from his dim prison in "The Theory of an Ideal World." There is no sound of greeting, but the five figures commune together in perfect felicity on "That which Endureth Forever." They speak not a word, yet they understand one another by a mere interpenetration of their beings. And when the northern wagoner has set his sevenfold team behind the steadfast stars, and Chaunticlere warns erring spirits to their confines, "P. E. M." rouses himself from his deep trance and says to himself softly under his breath, 'Hodie, vixi--to-day I have lived!'" The comedy continues in another passage.

* * *

"But of a sudden, in a harmless-looking essay--say that of William Beckford, you stumble and lose your footing over "the law of autarkeia,: and down you go whirling headlong into the bottomless pitfall and abyss of a discussion of the difference between the Oriental and the Occidental sentiment towards the infinite and towards personality, while Hinduism, Semitism, Alexandrianism, Platonism, and the Gnostic and Manichean heresies rush past you with the flash and roar of the wheels within wheels that dazzled Ezekiel when the heavens were opened and he saw "visions of God"--and "my word," as Mr. Drinkwater's Lincoln would say, what a God! You are, it is true, brought out of that headlong plunge into the unfathonable, as a skilful sky-pilot brings you out of a "nose spin," or as a dentist brings you out of the gyrations of a nitrous oxide trance; and you hear

Mr. More at your side quietly, suavely assuring you that now you understand "why Goethe curtly called romanticism disease and classicism health." Maybe you do; but it is not by reason of your ride behind him on the Gnostic nightmare. What passed in that flight is only a shade more intelligible to you than a Chinese incantation. Your education was imperfect: you are neither a Coleridge nor a Cudworth."

Although this "ghost story" is dramatic and entertaining, it is a question of taste whether this comedy is not out of place in a criticism of the Shelburne Essays, inasmuch as it takes away from the dignity of the essays.

The essay on the "Emerson Liberation" is rich in excerpts from Emerson's writings, which Mr. Sherman interprets from his reading of his essays and poems interpreted with the help of Emerson's Journal.

In the Whitman essay, Mr. Sherman interprets many of Whitman's poems, tracing through them his system of ideas.

In the Emerson Essay, he interpolates a passage on the modern spirit and illustrates wherein Emerson was an emancipator of this spirit; in the essay on Whitman he bases his criticism of Whitman on the idea of democracy, and calls Whitman the leader and representative of it.

From a literary viewpoint it is distracting to have a discussion of principles included in a study of persons and their works, because it takes the thought away from the works themselves. Both the essays of Emerson and Whitman, however, are superb in the presentation of their works and their ideas and there are many beautiful prose passages.

# EMERSON

Excerpts from the vol. Americans.

To know him is not mere knowledge. It is an experience; for he is a dynamic personality, addressing the will, the emotions, the imagination, no less than the intellect. His value escapes the merely intellectual appraiser. Analysis cannot deal properly with his pungent wit--it must be savored; nor with the impetus that he gives to the will--it must be felt; nor with the purgation and serene rapture of the mind towards which his noble discipline tends--this rapture must be attained as a state of grace by imitation of those who have attained it, by lifelong intercourse with men whose tone and habit of life is noble.

* * *

To many a lonely student, obscure and friendless, meditating in the long cold spring and adolescence of his talent on his untried powers, Emerson has come as with the sound of a magical trumpet, shattering the dungeons of fear, sending the young knight on his quest inwardly fortified and resolute to give soul and body to that undertaking, whatever it may be, for which he was sent into the world.

Excerpts

WALT WHITMAN

"Whitman interests and disquiets us beyond all other American poets by that personality of his, so original, so indolent yet intense, so fearlessly flaunted yet so enigmatically reserved, so palpably carnal yet so illuminated with mystical ardor that at the first bewildering contact one questions whether his urgent touch is of lewdness or divinity. There is something daimonic in the effluence of the man, which visitors remark and remember months and years afterwards as an impulse unaccountably affecting the temper of their lives.

"No other poet communicates so abundantly the sheer joy of living."

"I have set forth some of the main points in Whitman's system of ideas, but I recall his warning: "Do not attempt to explain me; I cannot explain myself." And certainly his service to us is neither contained nor containable in an argument. He gives us the sustaining emotion which prevents argument from falling to pieces of its own dryness. He fulfills the promises and justifies the faith of democratic society in his own characteristic fashion, by being a great individual, by being a great poet. He chiefly serves our society as poets do: "We do not fathom you--we love you." He is a lover himself and the cause of love in others."

THE ROOSEVELT ESSAY

The following passage is a criticism of the Roosevelt Essay.

"The essay on 'Roosevelt and the National Psychology' sums up with brilliancy and justice the diverse aspects of Roosevelt's character and influence.....Nothing that Sherman ever wrote received as much applause as this analysis. Historians like Professor W. E. Dodd and Mr. Worthington C. Ford praised it for its faithfulness, its balance, its insight and its temperateness. Professor Bliss Perry was so pleased with it that he read it three times. He also reported that a certain Harvard alumnus, in his zeal for the article, had taken it to President Lowell and insisted that 'men like Sherman are needed in the English department at Harvard.' But the most significant tribute, the seal, as it were, of Sherman's success, came from his arch-antagonist in the Smart Set, who called it 'the one intelligent monograph I have so far encountered' with "some positive ideas that are likely to be heard of in the Roosevelt criticism of the future, once the dusting of perfumed talcum powder and squirting of violet water ceases.'"[1]

A portion of Professor Babbitt's comment on the book Americans.

"You seem to me to have put a gusto into your paper on Mencken that is not common these days; so far as I know the personage, I should say that he has got about what he deserves. Your paper on P.E.M., on the other hand, though brilliant and amusing, strikes me as out of focus in certain essential particulars. Perhaps it is I that am out of focus.....[2]

The volume was dedicated to Mrs. Sherman. Mr. Sherman jokingly writes to Mr. Brownell:

"With all your subtleties, you will perhaps be amused to hear that I thought a little of asking permission to dedicate my Americans to you. But I rejected the idea with a sense that there was too much 'rough stuff' in the book. I couldn't properly ask you to lend your name to it. And so, as we say in my family, 'worst having come to worst' I dedicated it to my wife!--who has to stand for everything."[3]

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1 Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 369

2 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 546

3 Ibid., p. 523

# THE GENIUS OF AMERICA

## STUDIES IN BEHALF OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

"Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house."

The Genius of America
What Is A Puritan?
A Conversation on Ostriches
The Shifting Centre of Morality: A Study of The Vulgar Tongue
The Superior Class
Education By The People
Vocation
The Point of View in American Criticism
Literature and The Government of Men: An Apology For Letters in The Middle West

1923

Stuart Sherman and the Younger Generation

Carl Van Doren

Let it not be thought that he is actually the snowbeard that he is sometimes thought to be. Rhadamanthus though he be, he is younger than the younger generation, he is--to put it in round numbers-- a year younger than H. L. Mencken and Joseph Hergesheimer and Ernest Poole and Carl Van Vechten: Two years younger than James Branch Cabell and Vachel Lindsay; three years younger than Upton Sinclair and Henry Seidel Canby and Carl Sandburg; five years younger than Willa Cather and Sherwood Anderson; six years younger than Robert Frost, seven years younger than Amy Lowell and Clarence Day: ten years younger than Theodore Dreiser and twelve years younger than Edgar Lee Masters. He is the senior by only one year of Ludwig Lewisohn and George Jean Nathan and James Oppenheim; by only two years of Francis Hackett; by only three years of Sara Teasdale; by only four years of Sinclair Lewis and Carl Van Doren and Louis Untermeyer; by only five of Van Wyck Brooks and six of Floyd Dell and seven of Haywood Broun.

× × ×

He has used less critical muscle in spanking his juniors than in skinning his contemporaries.

* * *

There he sits in his midwestern study and swings the lash, while innumerable lions big and little snap back at him. He could not do that effectively if he were not a personage as well as a scholar and a critic. And he is a personage. He is one of the finest and strongest the country has.

* * *

He was witty, he could be eloquent, he had dramatic force, he wrote like a cynical seraph. Many people began to look up, and several began to look up to him.[1]

[1] Van Doren, Carl, Bookman, June 22, 1922, Vol. LV, pp. 354-358.

THE GENIUS OF AMERICA

Studies in Behalf of the Younger Generation

"Keep the young generation in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house."

The Genius of America was published six months after the book Americans, and Mr. Sherman called it sort of sequel to Americans. These books were noticed widely and at considerable length throughout the country and treated as important events in American criticism.

Its subtitle is "Studies in Behalf of the Younger Generation," with the above quotation from Meredith as an epigraph.

Before each essay are pertinent quotations from Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and Walter Hines Page.

In the Preface by means of illustration and figures, Mr. Sherman states that this genius is a stream of energy, a formative spirit, a creative force; it is culture. He concludes the preface as follows:

> "Where does it reside--in what institutions, in what customary and traditional beliefs, in what elements of the popular culture--that genius of America which dispenses one after another with all its great servants and confidently entrusts the destiny of a people to untried hands. In this book I have made rudimentary attempts to answer.

The purpose of the book is thus established and the thesis is broad enough to give unity to the essays.

This book contains four of his most outstanding essays: "The Genius of America," "What is a Puritan?," "Points of View

in American Criticism," and "Literature and the Goverment of Men." It contains two lay sermons for the Younger Generation "The Shifting Centre of Morality," and "Vocation." Acknowledgment was made in the Preface to the Atlantic Monthly for the first three of the essays.

Mr. Zeitlin evaluates the essays in the two books Americans and The Genius of America in the following selection:

> "Americans and The Genius of America were published within a few months of each other. In the former there is a greater body of writing that should endure than in any other single book of Sherman's. Only the first two topics, 'Mr. Mencken' and 'Tradition,' owe their being to a controversial impulse, while one or two others, such as Joaquin Miller and Andrew Carnegie, are of a doubtful vitality. But the essays on Franklin, Emerson, Hawthorne, Whitman, Roosevelt, the Adamses, and Mr. Paul Elmer More are as solidly based as they are brilliantly written. The portraits are all focused in relation to a clear ideal of national character, which gives an intellectual and moral unity to the collection, and Sherman's power of psychological analysis shows to the greatest advantage in the individual studies. In The Genius of America a larger proportion of the contents is the outcome of conflicts with opposing points of view or is composed in the spirit of the lay sermon. These circumstances, while they do not affect their immediate value, are bound to detract from the ultimate appeal of many of the essays. However, the book contains two of his most permanently interesting papers--"The Point of View in American Criticism" and "Literature and the Government of Men." The large grasp of a significant idea in the one and the emotion and eloquence of the other carry with them as much of the promise of survival as anything he ever wrote."[1]

In a letter Mr. More criticises the books for their critical views: . . . . ."I begin to believe that you are a better preacher than a critic. . . . .As a preacher of righteousness, I take off my hat to you. . . . .The book as a whole referring to "The Genius of America" gave me a real thril of pleasure. It is good and clear and strong and sharply pointed."

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 539.
[2] Ibid., p. 546.

"The Dial published a purely derisive review of Americans by D. H. Lawrence, which was more than offset by its appreciation of The Genius of America a few months later. 'The spirit and content of the book,' it said, 'are delightful. There is great wisdom--not merely knowledge--tolerance without sentimentalism, and keen satire where satire is due. . . . His demands are sincerity, sense, and ideals, qualities which he himself possesses in a high degree.'"[1]

"In an estimate of individual essays the volumes of praise might have satisfied the most insatiable of authors. Half a dozen of the studies in Americans--the Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, the Adamses, Franklin, the Conversation with Mr. More--were singled out in turn by different reviewers as superlative on their subject or in their kind. On the purely literary excellence of the two books readers of the most diverse sympathies were practically agreed."[2]

The theme of the essay the "Genius of America" is the vindication of the Arts in America. Mr. Sherman presents the criticism in this essay as fiction. He himself is a professor at a dinner where there are after-dinner speakers. Those present are an engineer, a bishop, a banker, a college president and a farmer.

The professor does not care for the speeches, for he says they all have a mechanical twang. In introducing a young speaker, the toastmaster says, "We'll now hear from one who will speak on the arts, the superfluities of life." The professor is so pleased with this address that he writes it down. The author describes the applause when the speaker is seated, describes the expressions on the faces of the guests,--the face of the Bishop is red with rage,--and the young lady looks admiringly at the speaker.

1 Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 540
2 Ibid., p. 541

The Professor converses with an elderly gentleman seated near him, about the lecture, and he brings up the question of what is a Puritan apropos of his discussions of the Arts in America.

After the lecture the Professor walks out with a friend, and as they walk the Professor tells a good story of what Judge Keeling, at the time of Charles II, did to a Puritan constable who arrested two merry wits and poets of the court. After further conversation, the old man turns in to complete his third reading of Middlemarch. The Professor says, "I went down the street resuming unaccompanied the more difficult parts of my meditation on the place of fine arts in a programme of democratic progress, and internally debating with the young man at dinner. Having made this general acknowledgment of his inspiration, I shall not attempt to reproduce our dialogue; for I found that he simply repeated the main points of his speech and interrupted my comment on it." With this remark, the author abandons the fiction and begins his discourse on Beauty and the Arts. The literary quality is seen in the dramatic introduction, in the dialogue and fiction, preceding the main theme.

The essay "What is a Puritan" is one of Mr. Sherman's outstanding critical essays. It defines the Puritan tradition in America. (See excerpts. PP ) According to Mr. Joseph Warren Beach the essay is modelled after Mathew Arnold in that it defines the Puritan by what he is not.

The two essays, "The Point of View in American Criticism," and "Literature and the Government of Men," are addresses written

for the William Vaughn Moody lectures in Chicago. They are written in dignified prose, the ideas are well organized and well presented. "The Point of View in American Criticism" is important from a critical standpoint, marking a definite stage in Mr. Sherman's formulation of his democratic faith. He is now turning to a more liberal viewpoint.

Concerning this essay Mr. Sherman in writing to Mr. M. A. DeWolfe Howe, tells him of the various publishers who have solicited him for a volume of essays, quoting an appreciative extract from one of them on "The Point of View in American Criticism" and adding that "this is only a specimen of similar letters about this article that I have received from New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, West Virginia, Missouri, North Dakota, Utah, California, etc., and that it has been the subject of extensive editorial comment, to my knowledge, in New York City, Chicago, and Tacoma. And the same thing is true of the other Atlantic essays, one of which indeed has already provoked a book by way of reply."[1]

"Literature and the Government of Men" is an imaginative conception of literature. The theme, as he wrote to Mr. Ellery Sedgwick, he had been trying to express since he was sixteen. "It is a statement of the utility of literature, of the part played by the master writers in determining the national character and influencing the behavior of people, rising to an eloquent contemplation of that 'spiritual society, exempt from the limitations of time and space and death' and ending on a note of strong

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 535

Emersonian liberalism:" This paper was first used as a Phi Beta Kappa address at Leland Stanford University in 1921.[1]

"The Shifting Centre of Morality," and "Vocation" are two lay sermons to the young people. (See Excerpts, pp. 58-60)

"A Conversation with Ostriches" is a dialogue between the author, and Mr. Thorpe. The dialogue is based upon the ideas found in George Duchanel's book "Civilization," 1914-1917. The theme of the dialogue concerns the indifference of the public to post war conditions.

"The Superior Class" is a satirical attack on Mrs. Gerould's Bourbonism. It contains a description of New England and an excerpt from Miss Alcott's Journal, showing the contrast between the love in a humble home and the snobbish aristocracy of Mrs. Gerould.

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 532.

The Genius of America

What is a Puritan

A Sketch of the Puritan Tradition in America

---------Its power to free the young souls from the fetters of fear, and to send him on his course like a thunderbolt; and above all, its passion for bringing the whole of life for all men to its fullest and fairest fruit, its passion for emancipating, not merely the religious and moral, but also the intellectual and the political and social and aesthetic capacities of man, so that he may achieve the harmonious perfection of his whole nature body and soul. To this vision of the good life Puritanism has come by inevitable steps in its pilgrimage through the ages.

The Puritan is profoundly in sympathy with the modern spirit, is indeed the formative force in the modern spirit.

---------The modern spirit is first of all a free spirit open on all sides to the influx of truth, even from the past.

We can recognize men as Puritans only when they have released and expressed their desire for perfection.

To enter into this spirit (modern) is what the Puritan means by freedom. "He does not, like the false emancipator, merely cut us loose from the old moorings and set us adrift at the mercy of wind and tide. He comes aboard, like a good pilot; and while we trim our sails, he takes the wheel and lays our course for a fresh voyage. His message when he leaves us is not, 'Henceforth be masterless,' but 'Bear thou henceforth the sceptre of thine own control through life and the passion of life'". If that message still stirs us as with the sound of a trumpet, and frees and prepares us, not for the junketing of a purposeless vagabondage, but for the ardor and discipline and renunciation of a pilgrimage, we are Puritans.

# The Genius of America

## What is a Puritan

Excerpts

---- I must illustrate a little the more intimately human aspect of our seventeenth-century group.

It is a part of the plot of our droll and dry young people to throw the opprobrium of the present drought upon the Puritans. These iron men, one might infer from reading the discourses, for example, of Mr. Mencken, banished wine as a liquor ----- The Puritans, as a matter of fact, used both wine and tobacco--both men and women. ---

Read your Pilgrim's Progress ---

Read Winthrop's letters ---

Read Mather's diary ---

Read the records of the first Boston church ---

Read the essays of John Robinson ---

Now, Cotton Mather had three wives --- call it charm; call it what you will; he possessed that which the Ladies' Home Journal would describe as 'What women admire in men'.

After a letter of John Winthrop to his wife in 1637, Mr. Sherman writes:

If, three hundred years after my death, it is proved by documentary evidence that twenty years after my marriage I still, in a familiar note, mixed up love and kisses with my collars and tobacco -- if this is proved, I say, I shall feel very much surprised if the historian of that day speaks of the 'sullen gloom of my domestic habits.'

The Genius of America

Vocation

Excerpts

Words which have long exhibited a radiant energy, words and things like "God," "Patriotism", "home", and "pure gold" are not to be lightly rejected in periods like our own, when their magic has fallen into temporary abeyance or when their value has suffered from mishandling. Before we abandon them to accept some wretched modern substitute--a band of greyish-white platinum, thin and fragile, for a plain ring of pure gold or "a stream of tendency" for "God"--we had better scrape the encrustations of time and base uses from the old symbols, and see whether a divine fire does not still burn at the heart of them.

(Mr. Sherman questions the use of the word "Service")--If the word and thought of service are to be rehabilitated, we must have new criterions of service.

Deep in the heart of the world is a passion for discovering a larger and better life for all the people in the world, not even excluding the intellectual and other privileged classes; and every one who assists in any way at that discovery does honorable service. Furthermore, whoever bends his full strength to increasing the healthy and pleasurable life of man, sooner or later will find in his work, whatever it is, something of the peace and satisfaction of religious devotion.

The opposite of a life of service is not any form of happy activity, but a slack, idle, joyless, half-hearted, shrinking life. There are numerous so-called good people who go about to do good in

such a crabbed, peevish, and melancholy fashion that contact with them makes the day bitter and burdensome. There are, on the other hand, persons gay and nonchalant, who never seem to give a thought to the "still sad music of humanity"; and yet one feels in their presence something better than a sermon, better than medicine, better than alms--one feels a current of energy and joy one feels new power and incentive within oneself. Such persons confer a favor on mankind merely by being alive. They add directly to the sum of human happiness. They add to the goodness of life. Theirs is perhaps the rarest and most precious form of service, the most beautiful of vocations.

For the popular and undiscriminating idolization of athletes, dancers, singers, marksmen, poets, jockeys, and supreme bakers there is this justification: each one of these heroes has demonstrated for the time the utmost capacity of the human body or mind in that direction. He has established a standard. To throw fifty successive "ringers" at quoits is a feat requiring an almost godlike faculty. There are few services higher than demonstrating the utmost capacities of the human spirit;---

Emerson says, "All young people thirst for a real existence, for an object -- for something great and good to do with one's heart.

You have not yet taken to heart the great maxim of Goethe: "It is within limits that the master first shows his mastership."

* * *

I suspect this unrest to be present among the younger generation because I hear of it constantly.--This is followed by illustrations. Speaking of education he says:

I think the next step in our higher education must be the effective preaching of a "new provincialism." I think we need to show our graduates the field for service and the large opportunity for the increase of happiness by carrying their college and university training back to the home-town, and making the new standards prevail there.

Epigram: The greater your talent, the better you can afford to strike root where you are.

It is a platitude, which nevertheless each generation has to discover afresh, that one serves the world best by doing eagerly what one can do best, and not something else. Therefore Pindar gave as a rule of life this injunction: "Become what you are". (Illustrations preceded this idea.)

---------As Emerson says, "He that rides his hobby gently, must always give way to him that rides his hobby hard".

Chesterfield's exhortation to his son to "shine" somewhere may be taken to heart even by a bookblack.

"Lay out the line of your own destiny."

"You yourselves are good fortune."

# POINTS OF VIEW

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1924

## Points of View

A number of essays in "Points of View" were written during the winter and spring of 1924 along with the "Cornelia Papers" and amid the pressure of other tasks. Quoting from a letter to the publisher, Mr. Perkins, of Charles Scribner's Sons, Mr. Sherman writes:

> "I have meditated on my collection--it seems to me personally to have as its central interest an attempt to arrive at a satisfactory critical point of view by inspecting in turn a considerable number of points of view."

The Preface contains an attractive figure to illustrate the lack of literary criticism in America. In this Preface Mr. Sherman states that in this miscellaneous collection, he is just speaking his thoughts aloud about men, books and ideas, and that he has gathered them from various periodicals into an accessible form for the courtesy of his listeners.

"Toward an American Type" is the first essay in the book. It was an address, a lay-sermon--given before a university audience on Thanksgiving Day, 1923. In the letter to the publisher, Mr. Sherman writes concerning this address:

> "It seems to please audiences very much. I gave it last week to an audience of 5,000 at Ann Arbor and probably 2500 others have heard it. They tried to give me the impression that every school master in Michigan and Illinois was hungry for a copy of "Toward an American Type," and I have had difficulty in preventing it being printed by interested friends including the Associated Press. I shall give it once more in New Orleans in June."

The subject of the essay is religion. Religion as the one power that can stop the movement of disintegration in American culture. He defines religion as that which at heart we earnestly believe in whatever it is. He found that our people agreed in the spontaneous support of six things: "cleanness, health, education, becoming intelligent, swift mobility, athletic games, and publicity or standing inspection," and he inferred that a type of athletic asceticism in the sense of discipline was the means of attaining these qualities. "Athletic asceticism," he says, "is nothing but the intelligent application of logic and conduct." The following selections will illustrate the variety and quality of Mr. Sherman's style in this essay.

Mr. Sherman begins his discourse in a personal, informal, conversational manner.

> "When I was in college, I used to poke around in the library a good deal, looking for books which would take me out of the shallow waters of college life into the deep channel of experience, into the serious life of the world."

* * *

> "Under the influence of Tolstoy and such writers, I used while still in college to go about among my class-mates and puzzle them somewhat and amuse them a good deal by asking them whether life was worth living."

* * *

> "I take it for granted that life is worth living, because practically every one acts upon the assumption that it is. But the settlement of that question gave birth to another question which I have been putting to my friends and acquaintances ever since. It, too, is a kind of Tolstoyan question. That is to say, it probes inquisitively into the foundation and underpinning of our dai,y conduct. It is this: "Assuming that life is worth living, what are its durable satisfactions?"

Mr. Sherman writes with enthusiasm; he puts himself into the address, and identifies himself with it. He uses vigorous language. There are repetitions, rhetorical questions, and short abrupt sentences. The sentence structure is varied. The whole address is oratorical in style; it is alive and interesting. In speaking of students loafing in their fraternities, cheating in their class rooms, thieving in gymnastics, he uses the style and language of Billy Sunday.

> "Their beliefs lie loosely like lumps of pig iron which need to be gathered up melted, forged and tempered and sharpened like a sword and girded to their sides and used to cut their way out of the obscure jungle of their conflicting ideas.

> "With a tempered and practised sword of belief they would cut through this big bullying idea of Liberty, crying: 'Only one half of liberty is good for anything; liberty to stagnate and rot is good for nothing; liberty to go to the devil is good for nothing.'"

> "They would cut through this roughneck idea of fraternity, crying: 'Only one half of fraternity is good for anything. Fraternizing with rascals is good for nothing. A fraternity of thieves and vagabonds is good for nothing."

> "They would cut through this ignoramus idea of equality, crying, 'Only one half of equality is good for anything. Equality in indolence and inefficiency is good for nothing. Equality in obscenity is good for nothing.'"

Again speaking of asceticism:

> "Asceticism is the discipline of a man who knows what he wants, and takes all the means to get it, and rejects all that interferes with his getting it. It makes him choose the means to be clean and fit and clear-eyed and swift. It makes him reject what leads to fat on his muscles, and mist in his eyes, languor in his blood, and dullness in his brain. He makes a religion out of the things that his heart desires, and he cheerfully consigns the other things to hell. And he feels the desirability of his object so powerfully that he lifts up his hands to the gods--the young Greek athlete lifts up his hands to the gods, and prays for victory in his race."

The following passage illustrates Mr. Sherman's manner of repeating key phrases at intervals throughout this discussion. Mr. Beach compares this rhetorical device to Matthew Arnold's use of key phrases in "Culture and Anarchy."[1]

> It signifies [the prevalence of plumbing] that every civilized man, woman and child in the United States believes in being clean, and in what is compatible with that, and disbelieves in being dirty, and in what conduces to being dirty. It is a little point, but it is something that we agree on. The whole pressure of the American community is towards being physically clean. . . . . Well, there is something definite that we all believe in; and are thankful for.
>
> I turned in another direction. . . . .I asked what the benevolent millionaires were expending their millions for; I found that they were pouring their millions into research for the extinction of pestilence, for the wiping out of hookworm, and yellow fever, and tuberculosis, and cancer, and all forms of communicable disease. And it appeared to me obvious that the American people believe in health and youth, and are anxious and happy to invest heavily in them; and that they disbelieve in whatever is incompatible with health and the preservation of youth. There is another definite point for belief and religious gratitude.
>
> . . . . . It means [the large expenditure for schools] that the American people believe in becoming intelligent just as fast as they can, and that they disbelieve in whatever is incompatible with that.
>
> I turned in another direction. . . . . [The business men] believe in publicity. . . . . [The business man] wishes as a business man and a producer to be able to stand the critical scrutiny of a hundred million pairs of eyes. He believes in everything that is compatible with that, and eventually he is going to believe in nothing that is incompatible with that. The pressure of a hundred million pairs of critical eyes is a tremendous molding pressure. The entire pressure of the American community is towards preparing a man to stand inspection, and whatever is compatible with that. Somehow, we may say, the man who is ready to stand inspection mostly seems to take hold of circumstances at the right end. The ethical implications of being able to stand inspection are immense.

[1] Beach, Joseph Warren, Outlook for American Prose. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1926. pp. 95-96.

. . . . Then I said to myself, the people of the United States believe in automobiles and what is compatible with them, and they disbelieve in what is incompatible with automobiles. They believe in, they rejoice in, swift mobility. They believe in being private engineers. Their delight is in driving a forty-or seventy-horse-power machine from place to place at a speed of from twenty to sixty miles an hour; and they believe in whatever is compatible with that. The ethical implications of being a private engineer are immense; but we have hardly begun to recognize what they are.

A paragraph of balanced and short sentences:

> "Mr. Bryan is right: we need religion. But Mr. Bryan is wrong: we don't need his brand of religion. The objection to his brand of religion as a binder of our characters is simply this: we don't believe in it. That objection is final. There is no use in trying to bind us with what doesn't hold us. What is religion? Religion is that which binds us and holds us. Religion is that which at heart we do earnestly believe in, whateve it is."

Mr. Beach writes concerning this essay, that Mr. Sherman modelled the address on Matthew Arnold in the following ways:[1]

1. In his adoption of being a Socrates going about asking questions.

2. Of defining "athletic asceticism" by stating what it is not.

3. And by the use of key phrases as illustrated.

"As for Mr. Sherman's use of Arnoldian repetition," continues Mr. Beach, "It does serve for clearness and to clench his argument, and satisfies the more obvious requirements of good writing. But it does not give one, to the same degree, the impression of subtlety and elegance."

[1] Beach, Joseph Warren, The Outlook for American Prose, p. 99.

Points of View

The Disraelian Irony

The essay "The Disraelian Irony" is a masterly portrayal of the life and career of Benjamin Disraeli--built up from Mr. Sherman's reading of the Moneypenney-Buckle Biography, the "duke thronged novels" of Disraeli, the private letters which Disraeli wrote to Mrs. Williams, and also from notes from Mr. Sherman's notebook.

Mr. Sherman's personal comments on his reactions to Disraeli as he reads the Biography as illustrated below are amusing. The passage is interesting for the adjective and verbs in series.

> "When I began the Monypenny-Buckle 'Life of Benjamin Disraeli," I repeated, in little, the experience of his own contemporaries; and this is clearly a tribute to the biographers' dispassionate, gradual, exhaustive elaboration of their hero. I contemned him, I ridiculed him, I disapproved of him, I compared his character unfavorably with that of his liberal adversary Gladstone and with that of his Tory leader Lord Derby. I distrusted him. Yet all the while I was amused, astonished, delighted, mystified, impressed and never wearied by him. And I read straight through the six volumes of the Life--interspersing the novels at suitable points--with only a little flagging in the middle, with vivid interest in the final volume, to the victorious and triumphant end. And now I strangely sympathize with the English lady who was asked which she would prefer as a husband, Disraeli or Gladstone. With feelings mixed but not altogether muddled, she replied that she would prefer to be married to Gladstone but in the first year to elope with Disraeli."

One of the purple passages in this essay, a long article divided into seven sections, is found at the beginning of Section V, beautiful because of the use of figures:

"He wore his Tory mantle with a difference, for, as we have seen, he had a taste for a certain distinction, for a certain splendor, in his attire. He soon proposed a renovation of the old garment. He conceived a Young England, a new Toryism, of novel cut and arresting color, with a substance of modern philosophical weaving but embroidered with traditions and adorned with antique jewels, which should impose upon the imagination of beholders as his own personal raiment did, when in his gaudy youth he walked in such glory that the crowds gave way, 'like the Red Sea,' before him. Accordingly he harked back to the Stuarts for a theory of the royal prerogative as the diamond brooch for his mantle; he laced and braided it with the golden popular monarchism of Bolingbroke's dream and with the hierarchical conceptions of Burke's historical philosophy; he re-enforced it with the antiliberalism of Newman, the High Church revival and Catholic reaction of the eighteen-thirties; but the main stuff and the pattern were suggestive of the greatest living tailor to the Tories, Thomas Carlyle, the romantic and radical designer of the aristocracy of talent, the loyal subjection of the populace, and the imperial destiny of the English. When Disraeli became a professing Tory, he closed his Byron and opened his Carlyle."

Mr. Sherman writes a vivid picture of Disraeli in formidable debate in Parliament:

Toughness, tenacity, relentless aggressiveness, and a diabolically cool remorseless wit had characterized Disraeli's approach to power in Parliament. According to his reputation and his record, copiously illustrated in the 'Life,' he was one of the most finshed and formidable debaters who ever rose in the House. A great part of his forty years of public life he was in Opposition; and the business of an Opposition, as his biographer reminds us, is to oppose. At this task he was a matchless master. When he had perfected his style, his favorit technique at the crucial points of his philippics was in the manner of Tybalt's sword play: One! Two!--a flourish of a cambric handkerchief--and the third in your bosom! He cut up a great minister at his appointed hour with the apparent nonchalance of an epicure dismembering a quail. He studied invective like a fine art. While the victim twitched and paled, he launched his barbed and icy sarcasms with a finely precalculated murderous precision. When he himself was

> attacked, he sat immobile, impassive, impervious, or with head sunk on bosom, feigning indifference or sleep. He had the gift of making his silence ominous, his repose sphinxlike, sinister. In action, by the sheer thrust and flashing velocity of his edged intellect he dazzled his hearers till slower-witted men gave way before him and fell behind and followed him, as one falls behind a dangerous weapon."

"I put months of work into the Disraeli (essay) alone. And I think the thing contains as much that is worth printing as either of its predecessors," writes Mr. Sherman to the publisher.[1]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 36

## Points of View

### An Apology for Essayists of the Press

"An Apology for Essayists of the Press" is one of the most delightful of Mr. Sherman's essays. The material of the essay plays around the books "Plum Pudding," by Christopher Morley; "Modern Essays" (33 essayists represented), selected by Christopher Morley; "Turns about Town," by Robert Cortes Holliday; "Seeing Things at Night," by Heywood Broun; "Of All Things," by Robert C. Benchley; "The Margin of Hesitation," by Frank Moore Colby.

At the opening of the essay these humorists pass in parade:

> "Enter, then, Christopher Morley, with a scarlet plume in his cap, smoking his faithful pipe of briar and bearing aloft his plum pudding; Robert Cortes Holliday, swinging his walking stick like Taillefer at the Battle of Hastings; young Heywood Broun, tossing his witty quips to left and right, and bearing aloft Heywood Broun, Jr.; the before heralded Robert Benchley, in cap and bells, presenting an excellent imitation of a Canadian professor of political economy; then, more sedately, Mr. Colby with his hesitant smile, followed by the 30 other essayists old and new, recently mustered by the scarlet-plumed master of the revels. The entire demonstration has a festive and holiday air. At the turn of the street one can fancy Mr. Morley leading in singing 'God rest you, merry bourgeoisie, let nothing you dismay.'"

Mr. Sherman turns from a description of the essayist to a consideration of the essay. He compares the essay to a modern poem and to the realistic novel as a representation of life, and concludes:

> "that life itself is an essay starting from nowhere in particular and arriving at no definite destination this side of death, but picking its way, like a little river, now with

"bright speed" and now with reluctance and fond lingerings over all sorts of obstacles and through all sorts of channels, which would be merely humdrum but for the shifting moods and humors that play over a bottom of commonplace with the transcient magic of shadow and light."

Speaking of the pressure under which the essayists write, he uses the following simile:

"Literature" you say in your haste produced by men who are too busy to write, for men who are too busy to read? No not that; literature like a sporting robin which built its next and laid its bright blue eggs just above the coupling-pin between the engine and tender of a jolting little train that twice a week links a series of villages among the Green Mountains."

Mr. Sherman, using his own words proceeds to "analyze each colymnist in detail and constructs the species." Speaking of Christopher Morley he writes:

"Christopher Morley chats me some forty chats." "The 'Dignity of Letters' has never laid her heavy hand on Christopher Morley, but the gusto of letters waits for him at every corner."

Then follows a vague poetic passage:

"Youth, romance, the sweetness of life and the shade of R. L. Stevenson in velveteen jacket--these are the spirits that have put Christopher Morley under obligation and that <u>whisper</u> him among the blue and gray shadows of an imaginative realism to be blithe and yet more blithe."

Mr. Sherman compares the "colymnist" to the serious "editorial writer":

"They bear the same relation to the serious "editorial writer" and savage critic that bees bear to wasps and hornets. The raw stuff of life which in the one case goes chiefly to strengthen the sting, is in the other case converted chiefly into wax and honey, 'Sources of sweetness and light.'"

"These diurnal and hebdomadal essayists," he writes "are giving to New York City a more genial and kindly air

than it has had since the days of Diedrick Knickerbocker"--"They haunt that level, these humanists, where men are conscious of their common humanity." He concludes the essay with the following sentiment:

> "They tend to make the stranger, at home, in the world--- This is perhaps, as near to a homelike feeling as a man can expect to come to in this world."

In this essay Mr. Sherman is at one with these essayists of the press. He mingles the serious with the light and humorous. He writes with a smile, not that of the satirists but that of the reader, smiling in amusement, and he leaves the reader with that "mighty pleasant feeling," as Mr. Sherman describes his feelings, after spending a week end with the humorists.

> "When one has spent a week end with the new essayists, one comes away not exactly filled and satisfied, not precisely inspired and uplifted but feeling as Pepys would say, 'mighty pleasant'"

## Points of View

### Forty and Upwards

"Forty and Upwards" is an autobiographical essay. The enumeration of Mr. Sherman's varied interests in his youth are of much interest. He traces the changes which the years make upon man, until at the age of 40 he is "hermetically sealed." "He faces a tragedy--he is imprisoned in his morality and character." "But an angel may just possibly unbar the door, and leaving his possessive, aggressive body sleeping there, let his spirit out for the recognition and appreciation of a new life."

"Out of the death of the possessive passion, a rebirth of the mind and imagination!

"Come, let us make a new set of maxims not for youth in their twenties with houses to build and children to educate, but for men of forty and upwards who are growing tired of one another and yet are not quite ready to die:

"Unfold leaf by leaf."

"Become more and more intimate with life."

"Ask no cold question of any joyous thing."

"Go to all living things gently, listening for the wonder of the breath and the heart beat.

"Ask all successful and happy creatures for a clue.

"Study all early things, with docility seeking their principle of beauty.

"Consider whether it is better to change and be living

than to be unchanged and dead.

"Eschew pedantry and make much of fine art: it possesses a secret of eternal life."

"Be your residence urban or rural, there is no provincialism so narrow as that developed by the inveterate maintenance of your own point of view."

"Push on into untrodden forests, up unexplored valleys, seeking new springs of refreshment, crying at the foot of every mountain ridge 'Let us see what is on the other side.'"

There is humour throughout this essay, though the style is uneven. There is a mixture of short sentences, questions, repetitions--and a mixture of the commonplace, with the imaginative, figurative and poetically beautiful expressions.

The poetic quality is felt in the maxims with which he concludes the essay.

Points of View

"Brander Matthews and the Mohawks"

"Brander Matthews and the Mohawks" is a vivid and lively essay. It describes the revolt of the younger generation against the standards of the Academy of Letters of whom Brander Matthews is a member of threescore years and ten.

Mr. Sherman found the theme for this essay lurking in the first short essay of Mr. Matthew's book "Tocsin of Revolt."

He uses vigorous lively language, the words convey sounds of revolt and images of battle, as will be noted in the following passages.

He compares "the antique mode of knocking at the door" ("The pretty phrase which used to be employed to describe the coming of age of a numerous group of new talents") to the present generation. As for the younger generation of the present day he writes:

> "It thunders at the door, it batters, it hammers, it bangs, it thumps, it kicks, it whacks, it wrenches, it lunges, it storms--it would require a Rabelaesian vocabulary to express all the indignities which the younger generation substitute for 'knocking at the door.'" "This somewhat barbaric performance Brander Matthews with his unfailing courtesy of phrase, calls sounding 'a tocsin at the door.'"
>
> "There is an inauspicious rowdiness about the present picnic on Parnassus. Laurel wreaths snatched from the heads of others seem somehow to lack the significance of laurel wreaths bestowed--the leaves are scattered, the garland is bare."
>
> "For sometime, as everyone knows, the Mohawks have been trying to blow up the National Academy of Art and

Letters as the stronghold precisely of the preceding generation. At frequent intervals their chieftains have advanced whooping to the portals of that serene citadel, and uttering every taunt known to them, have challenged the Academicians collectively and severally to come forth and do battle."

In the following he describes the men of the Academy of Letters.

"In the interior of a National Academy there broods the quiet of a club organized by old field marshals. Its members are made up for the most part of men who are remembering, not fighting their campaigns. They have passed through the cold spring of experimentation and of the dusty summer of struggle and unrecognized achievement to that clear autumnal season in which one writes one's memoirs, and composes articles to one's departing comrades, and turns an eye of curiosity and unenvious welcome upon the promising work of younger men."

The remainder of the essay is written in direct address to Brander Mathews:

"With that eagerness to understand the world you are living in, which has always characterized you--you lean from your window and catch the hostile shouting of the Mohawks in the street."

* * *

.....You are a lover of artistic form -. You are a craftsman in whatever you have touched; criticism, the informal essay, the story, the drama. What, then is the young people's grievance against you? Your unpardonable sin is that you are seventy. Therefore they batter at your door. It is the new manner.

This direct address Mr. Sherman no doubt borrowed from the French author M. Bazalgettes, biographer of "Thoreau," because in a passage taken from the "Thoreau" essay, Mr. Sherman describes this style of direct address as follows:

"Having thus taken possession of his author, he proceeds in the historical present to talk about him and to him, from the cradle to the grave,--as if poor Thoreau were in the next room, or in the passages of apostrophe actually facing his biographer who won't let him get a word in edgewise."[1]

1 Sherman, Stuart P., Main Stream (Chas. Scribners Sons, 1927), p. 39.

Points of View

In a second letter to the publisher, Mr. Sherman comments on other essays in this volume.

(To M. E. Perkins)[1]

1116 West Nevada Street, Urbana, Ill.,
June 6, 1924.

Dear Mr. Perkins:

I am sending you to-day, by registered mail, the manuscript of Points of View--complete except for a paragraph or two of preface and acknowledgment. I apologize for a few pages of the copy which I couldn't get into shape in time to have retyped; but I think all the rest is fair.

You will notice that I have added to my original table of contents several short pieces. I have persuaded myself that these will add variety and flavor to the collection. One or two of them are frankly skits--e.g. the one on Gertrude Stein. I put that in, for example, because it seemed to cause a great many people much amusement; and it is very short. The short notices of Tarkington and Kelley ('Where There Are No Rotarians') make side lights on the full length commentary on Sinclair Lewis. The little piece on Oscar Straus pleased Straus himself very much; and, in view of my alleged anti-Semitism, I should rather like to record admiration for a good Jew; besides that, I am an enthusiastic 'booster' for autobiography. The little piece on B. Matthews defines an attitude, and hooks on naturally to the Sam Butler, which follows. Etc.

But if you object to any or all of the additions, I shall not be obstinate about them. I have quite deliberately mixed these little sketches with portraits in gilt frames, to try the effect of that sort of exhibition; and I plan to say a word about that in my prefatory note. Yet if you loathe the effect in advance, I am subject to conversion."

Very sincerely yours,

Stuart P. Sherman.

1. Woodbridge, Homer and Jacob Zeitlin, Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman. Murray Hill: Farrar & Rinehart, Vol. II, pp. 636, 637.

Men of Letters of the British Isles

Portrait Medallions from the Life

By Theodore Spicer-Simson

with Critical Essays By

Stuart P. Sherman

and a Preface

By G. T. Hill

1924

Authors and Poets Portrayed

Arnold Bennett
J. D. Beresford
Laurence Binyon
Robert Bridges
G. K. Chesterton
Padraic Colum
Joseph Conrad
William H. Davies
Walter De la Mare
Charles M. Doughty
John Drinkwater
Lord Dunsany
St. John Ervine
John Galsworthy
Thomas Hardy
Ralph Hodgson
A. E. Housman
W. H. Hudson
Douglas Hyde
James Joyce
John Masefield
George Meridith
Sir Henry Newbolt
George Russell (A. E.)
George Bernard Shaw
James Stephens
Hugh Walpole
H. G. Wells
W. B. Yeats

"Men of Letters of the British Isles"

In the Fine Arts Department of the Boston Public Library will be found this book. The Preface is written by George F. Hill, of the British Museum, explaining the art of portrait medallions. Mr. Theodore Spicer-Simson is the sculptor, who came from London requesting the publisher to have Mr. Sherman write the sketches to go with the Medallions. He recognized the gift of illumination in his writings. These essays are short, each one differing according to the subject; they all give life to the Medallions and he in turn receives inspiration from them. Some are as clear cut as the Medallions, others are fanciful, symbolic, highly imaginative, written with an appreciation of color in words, of cadence in the phrasing, and of poetry in the diction. In these essays he gives the essence and quality of the writer, it is an impression, a portrait

Mr. Spicer-Simson expressed his pleasure at the result without reservations. "I cannot tell you how delighted I am with the monographs. They possess a variety which seemed almost impossible of attainment and a beauty and truth of presentation in their pictures which are very striking."[1]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 575.

[1] To Mr. William Chauncey Langdon he wrote in terms of even stronger appreciation: "Stuart P. Sherman has finished his task. All 29 monographs are written and all but one or two sent to the publisher. I think he has surpassed himself, that some of these short essays will be taken in years to come as examples of the best type of descriptive writing of our time--great pictures in words (which at the same moment conven information concerning the work and the author depicted) that are actually a new and original form of literary criticism which will certainly be copied."

"The monographs on Charles M. Doughty and Arnold Bennett are masterpieces of the highest kind and utterly different as the men are."

* * *

It is of interest to note what Mr. Sherman writes concerning illumination mentioned above. He has been speaking of how such a man e.g. as Roosevelt, can do so many different things:

> [2] "Then, too, there is much in getting up a big roaring fire in the mind; so that all its cavities and recesses are illuminated; and no faculty can shirk in the corner, and no material lie inert. Too many of us sit down in a small corner with a fathing dip--when we might equally well burn a thousand candles."

---

1. Woodbridge, Homer, & Zeitlin, Jacob, Vol. II, "Life and Letters of Stuart Sherman." Farrar and Rhinehart, 1929, p. 576.
2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 197

ARNOLD BENNETT

EXCERPT

A questionable candidate for immortality who will doubtless be requested to leave a large part of his literary baggage outside the door. But Arnold Bennett is the kind of man who gets what he goes after. He is infinitely canny. He is remorselessly efficient. Withal, he has a vein of genius which he works when, on shrewd calculation, he perceives that it will pay better then even his unrivalled efficiency. And so at the final literary assizes he will probably not only get in but will also get well up towards the front, wedge himself between Dickens and Trollope, light a cigar and with the Clayhanger trilogy in his lap, complacently await the last judgment.

With amusing malice his comtemporary, the author Boon, describes him as imperfectly developed, an aborted great man, who born a generation earlier would have been recognized as a Great Victorian--as it is no one will ever cherish his old hats and pipes. Now that Mr. Bennett is not at heart a Victorian is proved by the fact that he does not care a rip whether any one cherishes his old hats and pipes so long as every one buys some part of the million or half-million words which appoints himself as an annual stint--a brisk, terse "light novel" to consume on a railway journey, a well-made play, a collection of competent reviews, a guide to good reading, or to success as a writer, or a little book explaining how to get on well with your wife or how to make the most of twenty-four hours a day. Mr. Bennett is not in letters just for the fun of it, any more than Mr. Rockefeller is in oil.

His mind is a first-class shop of honest bourgeois ideas which he turns out in workmanlike fashion and knows how to market. If he had been born in America he would have been described as a "typical Yankee"

and he might have found sufficient glory and adequate reward for his efficiency as editor of the Saturday Evening Post or as president of a moving picture corporation.

In England it is still rather expected that an author who aspires to a place among the Immortals shall bestir himself to annex some new territory to the domain of British letters. Arnold Bennett met the test: he annexed the Five Towns. He possessed one great, sprawling, squalid, humdrum, pottery-manufacturing, unsung stratum of English utterly: its topography, climate, architecture, social usages, human types. He saw in an intricate but clear and steady vision all the elements in society which are classified as intelligence, will and purpose; and these last embodied in representative personages, enacting on the stage of the Five Towns, with tragic and comic Katharsis, all the varieties of dreams known to Polonius and Aristotle. When Arnold Bennett wrought out the Clayhanger trilogy, his efficiency was working humbly in the service of his genius: he was not a clever workman but a great novelist. "

CHARLES DOUGHTY

Excerpt from "Arabia Deserta."

.....A wide open gate through which the caravan streams: first a whiff of the green gardens and fresh fountains of Damascus, and a glimpse of Gilead with woodland limestone hills full of balm-smelling pines and the trees laurel with the sobbing sweetness and the amorous wings of doves;" then the motley and noisy assembling of litter-borne pilgrims, the grunting and smell of shuffling camels, the flutes and singing of Persians, the shouting and cursing of drivers; the signal gun, the long swinging march over league after league of burning wind-rifled sand through air, under the raging midday sun, like flame; the thirst quenched in pools brackish and polluted with wind blown dung, the prowling robber sheiks shadowy on the horizon, the mirage, the hyena glaring and gaping for the infirm and derelict; the swift falling dusk, the star canopied bivouac, the supper dates and camels milk, the watch fires and the alarms of sentinels; the breaking of camp in the darkness or the gray chill of early dawn, the camels exhaling a frosty smoke at sun rising; the comfort of bitter coffee and the narghile; then the march again through the sun baked, granite fringed wilderness, with a tension of nerves daily increasing till the ache of fatigue subsides into a sun drugged trance.

While Doughty travels with the caravan his individuality is merged in it as a pulse of its monotonous rhythm.

CHARLES DOUGHTY

Excerpt

These works were conceived and executed with patriarchal earnestness. Their pictures of barbaric life and character have the special veracity compassable by a man deeply versed in tribal manners at the hunting and pastoral stages. But his architecture and ornamentation is cyclopean. The uncouth vigour of his style does not in the least recall his avowed masters Spenser and Chaucer; it reminds one rather of a jolting translation of Caedmon. The ox-wain grumbles and groans under the rough hewn blocks which this stout, great bearded Briton goads his labouring team to haul to his stone on the heights of Parnassus.

Excerpt

# WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

"When Yeats rises, tall and pallid and tossing his iron-gray mane, closes his eyes and chants in an infinitely dreary far away monotome of the Danaan folk and the Isle of Innisfrae, of the golden apples of the Sun and the silver apples of the Moon, of clothes for his beloved woven of light and half light, of Deirdre and Queen Maeve, of the wanderings of Oisin and the secret rose, he seems all poet in whose veins a mixture of blue starlight and rose water has been substituted for blood. He seems less a poet than a lonely disembodied voice, once a man but exiled for contempt of his kind, metamorphosed into a white sea bird, and condemned to wander forever wistfully crying over foaming dark rocks of a wave-smitten coast. Such is the wan chief glory of contemporary Irish poetry.

As an accomplished weaver of dream tapestry, Mr. Yeats returned to Dublin, bearing the message that the way of salvation for Irish letters lies through the soul of the peasant who, while he drudges in bog and mire, dreams that he has been kissed by three white-armed queens of fairyland.

* * *

Mr. Yeats has not cared in his own work to effect a substantial union of actuality and ideality, and to present himself whole. He has preferred rather to attenuate himself by fasting in the ivory tower. He has preferred to send his spirit searching for immortality as a mere silvery emanation, beautiful but empty-handed and lost in a revery on a beauty of its hands.

Encountering his, one fancies that the hungry soul of the Irish peasant exclaims impatiently: "Stay me with apples, for I am sick of love." And he replies:

"I have spread me dreams
under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread
on my dreams."

---

Men of Letters of The British Isles

GEORGE MEREDITH

Excerpt

"Above all, he is an impassioned sage with unwaving faith in the wisdom of his joy. He rejoices in Nature and the life of healthy senses as a good in itself. He rejoices in a real good which he recognizes as a kind of selfless nobility of spirit. All these joys he pronounces very good; but the best joy of all is an exulting harmony of lives' three great harp strings sounding together. - - - -

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Men of Letters of the British Isles. p. 103

# C O N T E N T S

## Book I
## Challenging The Idea of Chastity

We Discuss the Responsibilities of Parents and Critics

I Meditate, in front of a Bookcase, on Scott, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and the Good Victorians

H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, May Sinclair, J. D. Beresford

Seven Reasons for Mr. Hergesheimer, D. H. Lawrence, and the Emetic School

We Discuss Marriage and the Hope of the Younger Generation

## Book II
## An Eligible Young Man

Cornelia's Children React to a Suitable Match

"Let's Walk"

Prerequisites of a Decent Marriage

Cornelia Appreciates Her Husband

We Discuss the Inner Life

A Theory of Happiness

The Real Thing

## Book III

## Treating of Modern Girls

The Education of Daughters
Flags of Revolt
Bloom
Careers for Women

# C O N T E N T S

## Book IV
## Cornelia and Dionysus

Ennui in the Provinces

New Year's Eve in New York

His Excellency on Economic Necessity

Vernon Willys on Bacchic Ecstasy

I Explain the Position of Caesar's Wives

I Discuss the Ethics of an Automobiling Civilization

The Vengeance of Dionysus

## Book V
## Approaching Religion and Other Grave Matters

We Meet in Southern California

Oliver Junior Discusses His Parents, Their Religion, and His Own

Table Talk at Santo Espiritu

A Silence by the Sea

Cornelia's Religious Experience

My Dear Cornelia
Preface

My dear Cornelia:

You and I have discovered many little differences of opinion; but we have always had so much in common, so many tastes and quite elementary convictions, that, years and years ago, I tried to persuade you that we ought to take a stand together. On that point we failed to reach an agreement; and which of us was right is a question that you have never since been willing to debate with me.

There is another point, however, which I have long desired to discuss with you: that is our common liking for dedicated things. I wish to dedicate this little book to you-- my share in it. The task embarrasses me; for, wherever in these pages I find anything that seems to me blithe or charming or wise, instantly I recognize that it is not mine but yours. Here then, in justice, I restore to you these feebly recorded memories of our walks and talks in sunlight and moonlight.

While I am confessing, I will tell you what perhaps I haven't mentioned before, that it was Mr. M. A. DeWolfe Howe who urged me to draw you into our conversation on religion. And I really ought to mention Mr. Ellery Sedgwick; but, the fact is, I have been just a bit jealous of him since he sent that telegram -- I showed it to you, did I not? -- shortly after he made your acquaintance, saying, "I am desperately in love with Cornelia."

Of course I don't mind your being admired, afar off, by anyone who pleases, no matter how dangerous he may be at close range; but this page, you must understand, exists only to record that I am

Ever faithfully yours,
S.

Santo Espiritu, Midsummer, 1924

MY DEAR CORNELIA

The "Conversations with Cornelia" appeared in a series of instalments in the Atlantic Monthly. The topics suggested by the Editor, Mr. Ellery Sedgwick, were ~~on~~ Chastity; Prohibition; an eligible young man; ~~on a~~ the kind of man my girl should marry; ~~on~~ the kind of girl my boy should marry; and young peoples' religion. Later these Conversations were bound into the book My Dear Cornelia. In a letter addressed to Cornelia--a very fitting Preface, the book is dedicated to the Editor. As the Table of Contents shows, the book is divided into five Books, with chapter headings under each. These headings convey some idea of the content.

The book is interesting from a literary viewpoint because Mr. Sherman combines criticism with fiction which has the rudiments of a plot. The thread of the plot serves to unify the various episodes. The author says that he wrote fiction because he wished to justify "novelists" in the book, and that he used a dramatic framework, because it was easy enough to write briefly and firmly an expression of a single point of view, but that he was interested only in inciting people to think out reasons for whatever point of view they should adopt.

This dramatic-fiction serves also as a framework for criticism.

It accomplishes what the author no doubt intended, to present abstract ideas in as concrete, interesting and entertaining manner as possible. The author does create the illusion of a world of fiction;—characters and dialogue against an attractive background as illustrated in the episodes "A Silence by the Sea," and "Cornelia and Dionysus."

"A Silence by the Sea" includes a very beautiful description of the sea and sunset; it is a romantic scene; the whole atmosphere is in keeping with the title.

"In Cornelia and Dionysus," writes Mr. Zeitlin, the dramatic interest was completely integrated with the discussion of the ideas and it had a deeper emotional note than had yet appeared in Sherman's prose. Mr. Sherman was justifiably pleased, also, with his success in individualizing his characters."[1]

There is much beauty ~~in the "Cornelia Papers,"~~ in the passages of description between the various episodes. For their lucidity and charm, they are classic in their beauty.

The dialogue is fused with the author's personality, with his enthusiasm, his inspiration, and his humor. The content is composed of concrete illustrations taken from life,--analogies; figures of speech; citations; quotations and allusions. The author speaks of his treatment of Cornelia as "gently and reverently satiric."

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 609

My Dear Cornelia

The excerpts will cover several episodes, including the most dramatic, "Cornelia and Dionysus" and The Vengeance of Dionysus." They will illustrate the dialogue and give the essence of the plot as follows:

The author, Mr. Sherman, takes the part of a Professor, a bachelor. He relates the story and forms the connecting link between the other characters: Mrs. Oliver, Cornelia, a charming lady of forty-five, who represents the conservative point of view toward the younger generation; Mr. Oliver, her husband, called His Excellency, a man of fifty-five; and their son and daughter, Dorothy and Oliver, Junior, who are in their teens. There are other characters, Vernon Willys, a novelist and friend of Oliver's, Father Blakewell, and Cornelia's aunt Alice.

Cornelia and Oliver quarrel over Dorothy. Oliver had been reading Heywood Broun on the care and nurture of children and decided that he would carry out his ideas on his own children. He decided to "turn over a new leaf, to meet his children half way, treat them like equals, instead of like superior beings." He had sent Dorothy for her birthday an expensive knicker outfit,a

handsome cigarette case and a big package of her father's own cigarettes, and when he had her hair bobbed Cornelia was so cross that she sent Oliver back to the city.

This gives Cornelia an opportunity to confide in the Professor, whom we are led to believe has warm affection for Cornelia. The subjects discussed are suggested by the titles of the essays: Chastity, The Eligible Young Man, The Theory of Happiness, Marriage, and others.

Cornelia and Dionysus

The Professor spends a New Year's Eve with the Olivers at their apartment in New York. There is a dinner party. Beside the Professor, Vernon Willys is a guest. The children, Dorothy and Oliver, Junior, go out to a party.

At the dinner table the four characters, Cornelia, Oliver, the Professor and Vernon Willys, converse on the subject of Prohibition. The Professor tells the reader that there has been an accident and that the following discussion is necessary for explanation.

The Volstead Act is discussed from four different points of view. The conversation, although tedious because of the subject, * is artistically written. The thread of the conversation passing from one speaker to the other is like a stringed quartet. There is a naturalness and grace about it, with wit, humor and sparkle intermingled.

After midnight Cornelia becomes anxious about the return of the children and goes to the window to look out.

* Because prohibition is a thing of the past.

"Oliver," she said, "why do you suppose the children don't come?" Almost in the same breath she springs to her feet and pulling aside the curtain cries;--"Oh! Oh! Oliver, what's that?" and an instant later, "Oh! Oh! Oh! How dreadful! Thank God! Oh thank God it's not the children!"

"Of course not!" soothed Oliver, with his arm about her shoulder. "Of course not. What was it, tell us about it."

Then she tells of what she had seen. "She could see a policeman holding in his arms a little boy--seven or eight years old, with his, face upward, hanging over the edge of the car--bright red with blood--absolutely one bright red disc of blood--and screaming. 'Oh it was horrible. You have no idea how horrible!' "

This accident occurs in the midst of a discussion on the "Ethics of an Automobiling Civilization."

After an interval Cornelia apologizes for interrupting the conversation and says "What were you going to say about automobiles when I interrupted?"

The Professor is the first to speak. "It would be hard," he said, "improving the occasion a little. Heavens knows I didn't get up the accident to illustrate my argument."

The conversation on the Eighteenth Amendment is resumed.

"It's half past one," said Cornelia who had risen at the first opportunity, "and there's the telephone. See what it is Oliver, quickly, quickly! But nothing could have happened to the children--my son is such a careful driver."

The Vengeance of Dionysus

This episode follows immediately after the preceding.

"Oliver stepped to his desk and removed the receiver. There was an inevitable moment of suspense."

"It's the Infant--they're all right," he turned again to the telephone and listened for nearly five minutes, during which he said, "Yes" several times. Then--"What's that?" and concluded w with "I'll come immediately."

"He faced the group with a smile meant to be reassuring. With a promptitude of thought and action he said swiftly and decisively, 'Oliver has been arrested for speeding. I'll have to go and bail him out. They are letting the girls come home. They will be here any minute. Willys will you go downstairs to the office and tell them to send a taxi here at once. Professor you go too and meet the girls downstairs. I want to have a word with Cornelia."

***

Oliver, Willys and the Professor entered the waiting taxi and drove away.

The Professor is speaking. "It seemed a good time to let Oliver speak first. He sat for a few moments in a frowning concentration, almost as if he had not been there. Then he ejaculated, still as if we had not been there; "My God what a mess! My God what a mess!'"

"Willys rallied him on making such an ado over a fine. Then Oliver hurled the whole thing between our eyes just as he himself

had got it, standing there so gaily in the library, smiling histrionically back at us from the telephone. 'The Infant'--he still referred to him as 'the Infant'--had been arrested on the charge of manslaughter and driving a car while drunk. He wasn't drunk, he said, but he had been drinking a little at the party, as the other boys had. He had somehow lost control and hit some people, a woman and a little boy, he thought, just a few blocks from home.

"Well, that's the gist of the accident."

The rest of the episode describes the Professor's journey home and his sensations and meditations as he rides in the sleeping compartment.

The Professor is speaking. "My mind was in that state of fatigue-intoxication in which one seems to be simply an observer of a succession of pictures which form spontaneously there. ... ... "Sometimes one manages to escape from the persecution of such pictures by reading a book. I had nothing available but the copy of the Bacchae that Willys had lent me.

"I looked out of the window. Another day had come. We were thundering through wintry cornfields--a hint of snow on the withered brown stalks. I rose, and passing through the silent sleepers to the deserted observation car at the rear, I went out on the platform and pitched the empty silver flask (which Dorothy had slipped to me to throw away) as far as I could pitch it into the wind. I seemed to hear from the corn a remembered godlike

voice crying: 'Oh celestial Bacchus, drive them mad!'"

Several months have elapsed since the passing of the accident. Oliver and Cornelia have quarrelled because of it. Oliver is in Paris, Cornelia in Southern California.

The Professor who had occasion to lecture at an educational conference at Los Angeles makes a visit to Cornelia.

Oliver Junior and Dorothy meet him at the conclusion of his lecture and drive him to the charming Spanish house where Cornelia is residing. It is the home of her cousin Ethelwyn. The children converse with the Professor while riding--as Dorothy drives--the conversation is chiefly between the Professor and Oliver Junior. "He discusses his parents, their Religion and his own."

"As soon as the travelers have removed their dust, they all meet for an early dinner. This was served in the suave air under the sky canopy of the patio or inner court--a delightful place, equipped with a fireplace against chilly evenings, and partly tiled and spread with Indian rugs; wistaria and myrtle and some flaming-blossomed vine tapestried the walls and rambled over the roof and festooned the wide archway on the west, which opened into a walled garden, green beneath a spraying fountain."

Cornelia, the children, the Professor, "Father" Blakewell, the tutor, and Cornelia's sister Alice converse at dinner.

Later they stroll in the garden. Presently the children, "Father" Blakewell and Alice return to the court to play mah jongg.

"And now," said Cornelia, recalling me from my swift revery,

"if you don't mind walking so soon after dinner, I'm going to take you down to the sea--for the sunset." She glanced at me sidewise and upward from gray eyes which deliciously feigned serious question about those words which her lips were framing: "Do you mind?"

The selection "A Silence by the Sea" follows.

Cornelia tells the Professor of her religious experience, they talk on religion and other matters. The Professor is speaking: "When the world is before one, where to choose, as it is for every one of us since Adam's day, don't we have to pick and choose--even about the 'really great things'? Like, for example, how we are going to spend what remains, at our time of life, of our poor little hungry human lives?"

"No," Cornelia replied. "No; for me, there is no choice at all about those things. Everything is perfectly clear to me now. I am going to spend mine with Oliver. The reaon why Oliver and I rasped so upon one another last spring was that we were too near together, with no point of contact but our miserable nerves. I have been learning this summer how to 'carry on' with Oliver. When we are together again in the fall, I shall not live with him, any more than I have for years. I shall live in my blessed mood --in my secret garden. And I shall be happy again, perfectly happy."

"And I?"

"You are an old dear!" she said. "A very dear old dear! Come now, let's go in." She seized my hand gayly, like a child,

and opened the gate, and led me through the walled garden, damp with the spraying fountain, into the bright colorful patio, fragrant with the cedar-wood fire.

Excerpt

A SILENCE BY THE SEA

---"Look down," said Cornelia. "This is one of our show places. And you'd better sit down, if you are dizzy at all."

We both sat and peered over the undercut rim of the bluff. Fifty feet below us was the sea, deep, still, emerald green, transparent and quivering with waves of pale green light, down into misty recesses where its depth rendered it opaque. Up through the floating foliage of the seaweed, goldfish were swimming idly, big ones in the grand style, tremendously decorative, and thoroughly conscious, I thought, of the stunning effect of their gold in the green water. I was fascinated by them. I stretched myself flat, face downward, and pulled myself to the rim and studied them. A damnable thought was swimming up to me out of submarine caverns of "theunplumbed salt estranging sea."

At first my thought had no shape. It merely stirred in dark obscurity, like an irritated squid or devilfish. Then it emerged -- with a golden head, like a mermaid's. I am not ordinarily fanciful or figurative. I dislike fanciful people. But I have somehow got to convey the idea that, as I watched those goldfish, the wires in my mind became crossed and tangled and, for a moment, made some sort of horrid imaginative connection between goldfish and mermaids and the enchantingly girlish figure and golden head of the woman whose gray eyes I felt but could not see, playing over my prostrate body and working some charm at the back of my neck. Cornelia had everything -- yes, everything: the virtues and the graces, and a beauty and blitheness which often seemed enough in themselves, they made one so immediately, unmistakebly glad to be alive within their radius. But wouldn't she have profited -- as Arnold once remarked of the ladies of the English aristocracy, whom Cornelia admires so much -- wouln't she have profited by " a shade more of soul"? Was there much -- inside, under those golden scales? Wasn't she pretty near the surface? And was that her fault or her

misadventure?

"Do you find them interesting?" asked Cornelia.

"Yes," I replied, continuing my study.

In spite of her nearly grown children, there was something virginal in Cornelia. Something curiously undeveloped; was it, perhaps, her heart? That would be like a mermaiden. She was no Circe, I mused, guilefully weaving subtle spells. She was an otherwise mature woman who had somehow remained essentially innocent and childhearted, singing still to herself, in her "secret garden," the songs of seventeen. She herself did not know, she could not know, what strains of richer harmony had been lost to her ears -- and to mine, because we had never emerged from the walled garden, had not dared to venture together into the "dark forest" of experience. She herself was an undeveloped theme, a divine fragment of melody, which the winds hummed and the sea sang, and which hovered all days and all nights in the tenebrous deeps of my enchanted heart.

"Look up now," said Cornelia softly.

I wriggled back from the verge of the bluff, and sat up, and looked up.

While I had been lying there in prone contemplation of the goldfish, the awaited sunset had arrived, and with a magnificence of splendor unparalleled in my memory. The sun itself was not visible. But the dull gray curtain, which as we were descending the mesa, hung from the zenith to the sea, had vanished before the passionate resurgency of light. Overhead, extending from north to south, stretched a vast skyland of royal purple, its lower edge, or shore, tinged with deep rose color, where the waves of light beat against it. Near the "shore" was a bright clear crystalline tract, without any cloud; but elsewhere, farther out in that celestial sea, gleamed, glowed, burned

an immense archipelago of golden islands. It looked like Polynesia transfigured with fire and praising God on the Day of Judgment.

It took my breath away. I gazed spellbound, like the spellbound color in the sky, to which Cornelia had called my attention just as it reached its brief period of seeming fixed and changeless and eternal. I turned to her. She was quietly watching my response to her sunset. Our eyes met; and for an instant they clinched. Then her lids drooped, and she said:--

"You were so good to come."

"So good? So good?" I repeated gropingly. "I don't know whether I am good or not. I am happy that I came. I only know that I am very happy. Is that a sign of goodness, Cornelia?"

"Yes," she said, and her eyes met mine again and held them prisoners while she went past them looking for something behind them, and I went past her eyes, also in search. We said nothing. The sea was still. There was not a sound from the bare brown land between us and the mesa.

Suddenly, out on the bare brown land, a meadowlark sent up her little bubbling fountain of song -- once, twice, Then she was still. We smiled at each other as the echoes of the bird's good-night reverberated through our nerves and died away. Then the silence fell, deeper than before. It was delightful at first. Then it became oppressive, exciting. It clutched at one's heart andmmade it thud. Or was it something else -- something that had stolen up, in the silence, between us?

Cornelia broke the spell. "Did you hear it?" she asked.

"The meadowlark, do you mean?" ---------

the abrupt end is to interest you to read, My Dear Cornelia

To a correspondent Mr. Sherman writes:

> 'Cornelia is in reality a picture of a 'lobe' of my brain, dressed up something like a lady and held off at arm's length, so that I can look at her from another critical 'lobe' which finds her in some respects quite amusing, and in most respects out of touch with the sense of life represented by her own children."[1]

According to Mr. Zeitlin, Cornelia embodies the claims of decorum, of social stability, of grace of manners, of all the formalized charms of civilized life. She represents certain qualities that her creator loves, and so she becomes alive in her loveliness on the very first page. . . . . ."the emotional richness and the poetry of the "Cornelia Papers" he says "were much to the encouragement of Mr. Sedgwick. . . . . .Mr. Sedgwick expressed his delight telling Sherman that he had struck a vein quite different from any other, and susceptible of much applause."[2]

The author writes to Mr. Sedgwick:--"this is a very expensive article to write, since one has to stuff and fortify it with the giblets and essence of eight or ten critical articles.[3]

"'Bishop Laurence told me the other day,' wrote the editor, 'that he did not believe there was a soul in his diocese unfamiliar with Cornelia, and questioned me as to whether I realized the ferocity of the Cornelia debate, involving the morals of S.P.S. and--what's more important--the Atlantic Monthly.'"[4]

" Mr. Irwin Edman of The Nation spoke of it as adding to Sherman's reputation as a writer and as an unusually successful attempt to make of current controversy something at once clear humane and entertaining by turning criticism with congenial faction and making ideas the hinge and persuasive voices of characters themselves living and persuasive whatever their desires may be."[5]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 602
[2] Ibid, " " "
[3] Ibid., p " " " 601
[4] Ibid., p " " "
[5] Ibid., " " " 633

"In the January number of The Atlantic, 1924 a letter of appreciation came from Mr. O. S. Villard:

> 'You have never done anything more brilliant or as brilliant as they say of pianists, its virtuosity is astounding and so is its sympathey and understandingness.'"[1]

George DeMille criticizes the 'Cornelia Papers':

> "They are an Irish stew of literary criticism," he says, "Platonic Dialogue--melodrama--and moonstruck romance, which add nothing to the author's reputation."[2]

Mr. Joseph Warren Beach in comparing Mr. Sherman to Mr. Arnold writes:

> "Like Arnold, he is willing to pronounce a coroner's verdict of death upon beliefs that are actually dead, and to find the hope of the future in tendencies present in our life though not yet prevailing.
>
> "The resemblance is still more striking when it comes to his tactics and rhetorical procedure. His 'dear Cornelia' serves the purpose of Herr von Thunder-ten-Tronckh in Friendship's Garland and of Mr. Roebuck and other persons quoted in Culture and Anarchy. Such figures give a touch of fictional liveliness to an abstract theme, and call out the conversational manner which the author loves, giving play to his humor and urbanity."[3]

At the time when Mr. Sherman was literary editor, Mr. Sedgwick again solicited contributions from him without avail. In a letter to his son, however, he writes:

> "Today all in a burst, as I was studying my next article there came upon me the general flavor and form of a novel, perhaps to be called Cornelia's husband which is an account of the way Cornelia took to Oliver while he was living away from her in Paris."[4]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 603
[2] Swanee Review,
[3] Beach, Joseph Warren, The Outlook for American Prose, p. 93 The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1926.
[4] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 776. (For literary interest, correspondence between the editor and the author concerning the writing of this story will be found in this Vol. pp.605-633.

# CRITICAL WOODCUTS

TO

IRITA VAN DOREN

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1926

Critical Woodcuts

Excerpt

Introductory

....He conceives of literature perhaps as a river, himself as a scout seeking for the main channel of intellectual and emotional activity in his own tract of time, recurring constantly to the point where the full rush of living waters comes in from the past, and eagerly searching for the point where the flood breaks out of the backwater and through the dams, and streams away into the future. He is always sounding and essaying to discover where the water is deepest now. He tries to characterize the most promising navigators, their crafts, their cargoes. When he concerns himself with historical figures, he seizes upon those who, by reason of some vital congruity, are felt by us as "modern" and pertinent to our present occasions.

....I have now and have always had a lively interest in the arts of expression; and yet I am not conscious of any alteration in my ancient conviction that all human activities have, up their sleeves, an ulterior object and ultimate justification in happier living; and that it is rather specially the "function" of critics to be engaged in an incessant untiring exploration in quest of "the good life."

The important change of which I am conscious is in the intensity of my conviction that no man should state very emphatically what "the good life" is until he has found it. Too much theory about it and too many preconceptions obscure the vision. The

best criticism is of a concrete and inductive habit. The wise critic attempts on all possible occasions to keep his theoretical and didactic mouth shut and all his other faculties open, here, there, and everywhere, for all the reports and rumors of positive charm and joy in things and people, as the most indubitable tokens that they are participators in some degree of that "good life" which he is seeking.

....In my exploration for the "virtues" of men, I have learned that patient search usually discovers some refreshing virtue wherever there has been exhibited any unusual display of energy. As I revisit my three little galleries, I am impressed by the abundance and variety and high interest of the vital powers exhibited there. Taking my "sitters" one by one, I rather think that my main intention has been to feel strongly the unique life in all these men and women from Sherwood Anderson to the Known Soldier, and to communicate the impetus of it, in a sort of blind faith that "where there is life there is hope," and where there is power there is virtue.

CRITICAL WOODCUTS

The volume Critical Woodcuts is composed of essays written for the literary supplement renamed "Books" of the New York Herald-Tribune, during the years 1924 and 1925.

In a letter to his son Mr. Sherman wrote that these essays should be called critical chronique. The book is dedicated to Ireta Van Doren, then literary Editor of "The Nation" whom Mr. Sherman made his Editor for "Books" , as she is at the present time.

His purpose for the book is that his work will constitute a picture of his age and its tendencies. The title of the book as Mr. Sherman states in the Introduction is taken from the illustrations by Bertrand Zadiz, who has done in art what the author plans to do in writing. He divides the twenty-six essays into three galeries:

> "Having carved these twenty-six critical impressions and having arranged them with various odd intentions in three little galleries, I am to stand for a few moments in the vestibule, exhibiting the artist and chatting about his exhibition with the visitors, the purpose being to lure the curious onward and to satisfy the incurious at the door."

He states his position as critic in the Introduction which is of great interest to literary critics, because of his change in viewpoint.

> "He conceives of literature perhaps as a river, himself as a scout seeking for the main channel of intellectual and emotional activity in his own tract of time, .....

He wrote to Mr. Spingarn that his love for rivers was kindled by Thoreau, and the reader is reminded in this passage of Mr. Sherman's canoe trips with Mr. Zeitlin along the Manistree River at his summer home in Michigan.

There are surface changes in "Books" . The essays are shorter than the previous studies. They average about 3,000 words apiece. The most noticeable change is in the language. Mr. Sherman is not now a professor writing for an academic audience, he is a journalist addressing the average reader whom Mr. Sherman defines as the man or woman who habitually reads the best seller and the periodicals with a circulation of a million or so. He is now the best known literary Editor of one the coun try's largest newspapers . He now uses popular language and colloquialisms. He says, "Rose Macaulay is one of the wittiest writers going;" that "Jefferson had a couple a hundred slaves;" that "Chekhov was up to his neck in the short story." When some of the reviews of Critical Woodcuts called attention to the journalistic quality of his new essays, he took great pleasure in showing them to Mr. Julian Mason, managing editor, who had been insisting that the first page of "Books" was not sufficiently journalistic. Of course the proprietor of the Herald-Tribune had no desire to convert Sherman into a journalist. Their purpose in bringing him to their newspaper was to give it literary distinction.[1]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 773

Mr. Sherman considered concretness and personality the chief essential of journalistic writing, and to his son he writes that to be as specific in vocabulary as possible was the key to freshness and interest. . . . . Another source of vitality is sensuousness. "This is an aspect of the literary art which since I have been writing for the large audience of a newspaper I think about more frequently than when I wrote for a more academic audience."[1]

It is the charm of Mr. Sherman's genial personality which makes these essays so readable and interesting. The reader comes upon such personal comment as the following:--

> "And I myself had almost forgotten to say that I have loved Thoreau longer and more steadily than I have loved any other American writer whatsoever.....I had almost forgotten to say that here on my desk is a little sheaf of my own notes from Thoreau's "Spring," dated April, 1900, full of the friendliest things that he said to me a quarter of a century ago."

> "Thomas Beer enchants me by his air of an elderly and rather sweet-hearted Petronius."

> "Nothing in contemporary fiction has stirred me, I think quite so profoundly as the deep rich harmonies Miss Cather makes in this story by the interweaving of her life preservative with her life expansive themes in those marvelous chapters where she shows Shea musically assimulating among the ruins of the cliff dwellers the history of humanity's struggle for survival.

* * *

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 718

Aphorisms and epigrams as illustrated below are found in Mr. Sherman's writings.

"The artist who will not give all is no true lover of his art and his mistress will forsake him."

"The object of one unfailing love is their art."

The following quotation refers to Walter de la Mare's poems:

> "I've decided that I am really in love--the way I know it is because they make me very happy which is far from being an easy task."

Mr. Zeitlin gives this comprehensive summary of the subjects of the essays:

> "A range of interest that shows some constant awareness of his large newspaper audience taking in politics, society, science and religion along with every aspect of pure literature and a sympathetic presentation of a remarkable variety of moods is what characterizes the succession of Sherman's Essays as they appeared in "Books." [1]

The following are some of the most interesting essays to the present reader: "George Washington as Diarist"; "Barrett Wendell: Farewell, New England Gentleman"; "William Osler: the High Calling of Medicine"; Mandeville on the Seamy side of Virtue"; "Boswell on His Own Book";"Oscar Wilde: a Dandy of Letters and Acquainted with Grief"; "Pierre Loti and Exotic Love"; "Interpreting Jesus."

To his son Mr. Sherman writes:

> "I'm sorry you don't think my criticism important. It is hard to be important every week. Mr. Arnold in his life time perhaps wrote fewer reviews than I have written in the last nine months."

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 707

In his next letter he remarks about Stewart Edward White: "I suppose you will damn this subject as unimportant; but we try to treat all aspects of things and Arizona Nights has sold 108,000!!"

As a special feature to this literary review, Mr. Sherman in collaboration with Garetta Bussey wrote articles for the column called Letters to a Lady in the Country. Mr. Sherman said that these letters were to be vehicles for describing surface observations upon life in the city. These were published and he took pride in telling his son, who did not wholly approve of them, that 2700 had been sold, and that the staff wished for their continuance.

"One does not feel that there was any extravagance when Mr. Geoffrey Parsons exclaimed to Mr. Julian Mason: 'We are printing to-day in Mr. Stuart Sherman's stuff the best stuff that has ever been printed in any New York newspaper.'"[1]

"If there is any significance in the tributes of authors whose books have been received, it is doubtful whether a more impressive array of testimonials was ever collected by a practicing critic in so short a time."[2]

Critical Woodcuts was the last book which Mr. Sherman published before his death. His primary motive in coming to New York had been to develop his literary vein in a new direction. "The inducement for me " he writes "is very largely

1 Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 701
2 Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 702

a sense of the necessity of seeing some other point of view than that of a professor."

"It was a grind 99% of the time"he wrote"and this Juggernaut to which I am attached consumes me flesh, bones, and fingernails at present."[1]

"To Harold Hildebrand he declared that the last two years of his life had beenhappier than all the rest put together."

Dr. Henry Seidel Canby wrote:

> "This two years of his New York editorship were most interesting to his friends and admirers.".....He who had dealt only with the mighty ones of letters now wrote of go good, bad, or indifferent alike!.....Travel books, trivial novels, passing essays, along with Anatole France, Byron and Poe.....There was an immediate gain in interest but a loss in power. Although in New York he lived as simply and almost as quietly as in his Illinois home, he seemed to yield his will for the time to a great city to be blown with the winds of doctrine with somewhat of the New York tolerance, to share with New York the excitement of this month's sensation..... He subdued like New York high seriousness to an active interest in everything human.....He seemed to change from a Thoreau to an Irving. .....The old Sherman had not bowed down the knee to Baal. He had kept his principles if he had lost his prejudices somewhere below 14th street. He had renewed his youth with the reading of middle age in his head; he had seen the new literature at home and also the new writers, and was ready once again to draw on the prophet's mantle.....His death has cost us dear--for he had in his power gifts that no one else possesses and a weapon for defense and offence that no one else can wield.....He was a great man--which cannot always be said of scholars and critics, an admirable scholar, a most fruitful teacher; a critic who even in a career unhappily truncated was one of the potent voices of our times. It will be as a critic of American life and literature that he will be ultimately remembered."[2]

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 771
[2] Canby, Henry Seidel,"Saturday Review of Literature," Stuart P. Sherman, Aug. 28, 1926.

"When he became a journalist," says Mr. Hamlin Garland, "some of his readers feared a decline from the dignity, restrint and grace which had made his books so notable. I think he had some such fear himself for he gave to his reviews such labor that they kept the high level of his essays--they were essay--written in the seclusion of his study, unhurried and serene, with the scholar's love for style.

"Standing for nobility of purpose, he maintained even in the midst of increasing critical tumult and confusion the high standards of a lineal descendant of Emerson and Lowell.

"It is not safe to predict long life to any man's books in these days of the radio and moving pictures, but Sherman's critical estimates have in them something akin to the master spirits of the past. He voiced a certain phase of criticism and cannot be overlooked in any estimate of our time." [1]

[1] "Commemorative Tributes," American Academy of Arts and Letters, Pamphlet No. 6, 1932, pp. 27,31.

Critical woodcuts

Barrett Wendell
Farewell, New England Gentleman

Excerpt The following is a portrait drawn from Mr. Sherman's diary:

"He entered the lecture room with a cane, in a cutaway coat and spats, with the air of an Anglicized Boston man of letters who had crossed the Charles to speak to the boys about life. As he proceeded to his desk we noticed that his hair was parted down the back of his head to his collar. He plucked his glasses from their hook somewhere about his waistcoat, and diddling them on the end of his forefinger, began to speak in his highly mannered voice, with frequent breaks into falsetto...The formal dress, decorous aspect, and little affectations of the man were in delicious contrast with (his) opening speech, and indeed with the entire point of view in the course. The man's mind was lucid, honest, virile, burly and absolutely untrammeled."

Don Marquis, Poet

Excerpts

I don't know--nobody knows--just how it came to be accepted as axiomatic that it is better to be even the worst kind of a poet than even the best kind of a humorist. Probably it is connected in some way with our deep-seated northern European conviction that there is no virtue where there is no suffering. And, confidentially, I think it is nonsense. All the same, when I was told that Don Marquis is essentially a poet I elevated my eyebrows in the conventional way and said, "Alas!"--meaning what a pity that a man who is essentially one thing should be devoting himself, however successfully, to something else.

My curiosity, however, was aroused, for I had sat once within eyeshot of Don Marquis for an hour or so; andhaving in surreptitious sidelong glances studied his bulk--I like to see letters represented by men and women whom the wind won t blow away--the silvery grizzle of his solid head, his tawny temperamental skin, and a certain gravity of the ensemble--a gravity illumined by occasional lambencies of smoldering eyes--I had wondered then what else he was besides the creator of the aspiring Hermione, the Red-Haired Lady and such Falstaffian poetry as the Old Soak. Something else, I was sure; for he was a visible reminder of George Meredith's discovery that all the great wits have been grave men. Several feet away one could feel that there was some one there. If I had possessed the sang-froid

of the representative of the press who interviewed the sanguinary Cleopatra, in "Famous Love Affairs," idly flicking a slave, from time to time, from her roof garden to the crocodiles below as she chatted with the journalist, I might then and there have boldly accosted the daimonic mask and have plucked at the heart of his mystery, saying, "What are you, essentially?"

Critical Woodcuts

CRITICAL WOODCUTS

Sherwood Anderson

The first paragraph illustrates alliteration. The second illustrates a belligerent passage.

But he is distinctly from Chicago, too. from the Chicago of Mr. Darrow and Mr. Masters and Mr. Sandburg and Margaret Anderson, from roaring, odorous, fulginous Chicago where poets are obliged to yell if they are heard above the booming of big business, the bellowing of the stock yards, and the bass drums of advertising conventions.

* * *

R. L. S. Encounters the Modern Writers

"Now I confess that I enjoy the clash of school with school in a struggle for survival, and I like encounter with a critic who drives a thesis hard against the vibration of an adversary. A stiff fight over the body of a wounded or assulted leader animates the scene, recruits fresh combatants and jolts the sleepy-eyed to partisanship. But I like too a nice regard for truth in these collisions the blade of the swords now entering a joint in the armor and not shattered on impenetrable steel or coarsely used as a bludgeon. And to lapse a little into the Elizabethan style of my youth, most of these things which Mr. Swinnerton says about Stevenson seems to me as false as hell and for saying them I could eat his heart in the market place."

# THE MAIN STREAM

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The essays in this volume were all printed in "Books," the literary supplement of the Herald Tribune, in 1924, 1925, and 1926.

MAIN STREAM

An American Version of Montaigne

The following passages are portraits of Montaigne:

"There were many other tastes and passions in Montaigne which belong to men of the nobler sort: his love of heroes, his thrill in the presence of valorous and magnanimous action, his fear of fear, his hatred of cruelty, his disgust at haggling and niggling, his downright devotion to plain truth and scrupulous honesty in the ordinary intercourse of life, his delight in solid authors, his discriminating enthusiasm for poetry, and, above all, his immense reverence for Socrates, which in itself is assurance that a man recognizes the godlike in humanity and can never become a cynic of Mandeville's type. He sees with regret that the intelligent men of his day "use their sharp-wittedness to dim the glory of the noble and generous acts of ancient times."

* * *

Montaigne's distinguishing contribution to the moral life of the world is rather the temper in which he holds his virtues than any one of them. The temper of Montaigne--all his friends know what that means, and they know that it means something peculiar to him, and for which he is the chief modern source. The temper of Montaigne is a mood blended of many elements--of self-respect and sensitive respect for others; of pride in the intellect and ultimate intellectual humility; of gayety in manner and fundamental seriousness of heart; of speculative openness and curiosity and practical moderation and conservatism; of alert responsiveness to pleasure and clear recognition of duty. The temper of Montaigne is "sweet reasonableness" taking up its dewlling in a man of strong personality in whom the rude force of individual motives and ideas has been subdued and rendered civil and urbane by habitual association with a thousand other ideas and motives."

This portrait of Montaigne applies to Mr. Sherman as a man also, in some respects.

MAIN STREAM

Carl Sandburg's Lincoln [1]

The Conclusion: "I am glad Carl Sandburg wrote this book. I like Lincoln the better for it and Carl Sandburg and myself and my neighbor. And that result, when all the ado about free territory and squatter sovereignty is forgotten smoke, that result is the living virtue that streams out of Lincoln forever."

* * *

William Beebe as Merman [2]

"The world is full of symbols opaque as a wall or transparent as a window, according to the penetrative virtue of the light one carries."

"In science, as in poetry, progress and the insights of genius are vouchsafed to men with courage to become one with the object which they describe--as in experimental medicine one learns the effects of germs and toxins by puttingthem into one's blood. 'If anything is worth studying intensively,' says Mr. Beebe, 'one must absolutely identify one's self with it. Some of the greatest joys of my life coie when I shed the unlovely manbody thing which I am condemned to carry about through life as transportation and periscope to my mind and soul. For the time being I must become pheasant, protozoan, sloth or tree.'"

[1]This illustrates the charm of Mr.Sherman's personal remarks.

[2]The above passage typifies the way Mr. Sherman identifies himself with his subject.

# SHAPING MEN AND WOMEN

## ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND LIFE

Edited
by
Jacob Zeitlin

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1928

Shaping Men and Women

Preface

The volume, Shaping Men and Women was published by Mr. Zeitlin after Mr. Sherman's death. He tells in the Preface the purpose of the volume as follows: "The Preface of this volume is to bring together the essays and addresses in which Stuart Sherman expressed his ideas in the profession in which he spent the greater part of his active life. They constitute a record and memorial of his work as teacher and scholar. To give background and coherence to these miscellaneous and widely scattered papers, the editor also has incorporated an Introduction in which will be found material drawn from letters, diaries and other manuscript sources."

Mr. Zeitlin, a colleague of Mr. Sherman's at the University of Illinois has been Mr. Sherman's Boswell. He has given us in the Introduction much interesting material on Mr. Sherman's idea of teaching English, and the book is rich in essays of literary interest.

The first essay in the book is a fervent and inspiring address "Shaping Men and Women." An address delivered Nov. 17, 1925 to the teachers in Detroit, glowing with enthusiasm. The theme of the address is that we should always find romance in life, that is, that we should find romance in our work.

Mr. Sherman speaks of our desire to be formed and uses as a symbol a sculpture by Rodin, describing it in the

following manner:

"It shows the naked figure of a bearded man whose body below the waist is without form and immersed in stone. He stands facing the fair body of a young child, whose limbs are somewhat further disengaged from the rock, and breathes upon it as Elijah breathed upon the widow's son, as Pygmalion, the sculptor breathed upon the cold marble form of Galatea, as God breathed on the dust of the garden till they came alive. That is the whole business of education."

The glow from this address must have radiated to the teachers there, as it warms the reader to-day.

The Graduate School Essay is written in criticism of the teaching of English in the Graduate School, taken from Mr. Sherman's experience at Harvard. In this essay he objects to reducing English to a science, and he brings out this same criticism in his well-known essay, "Professor Kittredge." The first of this essay is however taken up with an amusing picture of Professor Kittredge conducting a class in Shakespeare.

Other essays in the book, "Personality in Professors," and "Professing Literature," have to do, as the title suggests, with the importance of personality in Professors.

In a quiet little essay, "The Essays of John Jay Chapman" will be found a description of one of Mr. Sherman's college Professors whom he had at Williams. The description is so clear in outline that it stands out as a picture.

The essay, "An Interview with a New Comer in New York" is autobiographical in that it refers to Mr. Sherman's coming to New York leaving the academic world to be a journalist. It is written in the form of a dialogue between himself and a Madame. It is a criticism of academic life written in a humorous vein, and as Mr. Zeitlin says "it has a sting to it." One passage is of especial interest in that Mr. Sherman enumerates all the things that a busy professor is supposed to accomplish. It is a long and varied list.

In another passage he states that all universities are nationalized; that they are all alike from coast to coast, each standing for tradition and democracy. There is one college however, that is different. He quotes Mr. Edwin Slosson as follows:

"By the time he had visited half a dozen of the leading institutions he was ready to gasp for joy and reach for his notebook when an English professor, to whom he had confided his troubles said, 'Let me take you out to the farm. What we are proudest of here is our white bull.'"

The Madame says, "But that is different, isn't it?"*

Yes, for a moment. But the instant Mr. Slosson's book on colleges appeared every university in the country made an appropriation.

Judging from Mr. Zeitlin's Preface this essay was responsible for the writing of this book, and it was written, as he said, as a ~~memorial~~ record of his work as teacher and scholar.

*~~This suggests Mark Twain.~~

There could be no more fitting ~~memorial~~ record of Mr. Sherman's work as a scholar, than the essay: "Ford's Contribution to the Decadence of the Drama," a chapter taken from his doctoral dissertation written at Harvard in 1906. In this essay Mr. Sherman criticises all the works of Ford and compares them to the works of other Elizabethan dramatists against a background of the seventeenth century. It was spoken of by Professor Kittredge himself, as one of the few dissertations that he had ever seen that possessed literary quality.

An essay as evidence of his great scholarship is the essay entitled "English and Latin." It is a paper read at the Illinois high conference (Nov. 24, 1911.) In it he takes up first the relation of Latin to the English vocabulary and style and then to the consideration of the relation of Latin to English literature, and illustrates how Latin is the very bed rock of English Literature. It is a long essay divided into four sections. The whole essay, in the spirit that it is written, reflects a genuine love and knowledge of the classics.

"Thomas Campion" is an essay revealing Mr. Sherman's feeling for Latin poetry. A number of the poet's lyrics are in the essay and it is beautifully written.

Tucked in this book is a short essay,--a tercentenary tribute, "Shakespeare" 1616-1916. It is very imaginative and poetical. Mr. Sherman addresses Shakespeare and sees his spirit "soaring heavenwoard," soaring aloft to rule over the Kingdoms of

the imagination forever."

"For you winged your way into the starry firmament like a leader of a seraphic host, attended by the immortal creatures of your compelling dream."

"The Gaiety of Socrates" is an address read at the annual dinner of Phi Betta Kappa. An excerpt will best serve to illustrate the temper of this essay, in which Mr. Sherman's intellectual wit plays upon the thought of Socrates as the "best diner out in Athens." In this essay he is just bubbling over with humorous allusions gathered from every source. See page p. 137.

# THE EMOTIONAL DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

## PREFACE

Two volumes of the writings of Stuart Sherman have been published since his death. One was made up wholly of articles from the New York Herald Tribune "Books," the other was a collection bearing specifically on his interests as teacher and scholar. Neither of these volumes had room within its plan for certain essays which merit preservation along with the maturest examples of his literary craft. Some of them contain his latest utterance on subjects which engaged his lifelong attention. Others suggest the new directions into which his curiosity was reaching. The piece which supplies the volume with its title--Sherman's only address before the American Academy of Arts and Letters--is specially important as a statement of the feelings which inspired the work of his final years.

The essays have all appeared in print, but not always in the most accessible places. In putting them now between the covers of a book the literary executors of Stuart Sherman believe they are committing no offense against the fastidious taste of their author. It is their intention that this collection of his essays shall be the last.

R. M. S.

Dedicated to

ADA P. SHERMAN

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THE EMOTIONAL DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

This volume of essays was published after Mr. Sherman's death by the literary executors. The Preface is signed by Mrs. Sherman and dedicated to Ada P. Sherman, the author's mother. It contains some of the finest essays, the majority of them from "Books".

It states in the Preface that the literary executors believe they are committing no offense against the fastidious taste of their author. In the writer's opinion it is a question of taste to include the essay on Cellini --it is gruesome in places. It is however a lively, very humorous essay written with much gusto. The excerpt illustrates the lucidity of the prose as well as the style. The writer recognizes this style in the essay "Squire Osbaldeston--An Old English Sport."

"The Emotional Discovery of America" from which the book takes its title, was one of four addresses given in commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the founding of the Academy of Arts and Letters, published April 23, 1904. The other addresses were: "The Relation of American Literature to American Scholarship in Retrospect and Prospect," by Prof. Paul Shorey; the "Literature of Early American Statesmanship," by David Jayne Hill; "Kinship and Detachment from Europe in American Literature," by Prof. Bliss Perry.

The address is an outstanding one--a topic close to the heart of the author--it did honor to the occasion for which it was written, in its scholarship, its beauty, and eloquence mingled with a comic spirit turning to irony, and ending in an expression of tolerance among the members of the Academy to a new point of view in the Advancement of Letters.

The essay traces the emotional discoverers in America from the first explorers up through the centuries to the Twentieth Century. Itis made interesting and very humorous by quotations taken from Old Colonial Records, and ends with a quotation from Sherwood Anderson's Story Teller's Story which tells of his walking out of his office to become an author.

> "Doubtless this emotional discovery began when Leif Ericsson beached his boats on the shores of Labrador; but the records are wanting. It continued with Columbus, for we read that when he and his crew, men of Latin blood, came ashore on San Salvador, they all gave 'thanks to God, kneeling upon the shore, and kissed the ground with tears of joy.' I think all Americans should feel that way about their native soil."

"To the Puritan discoverers of America as an emotional fact," he says, "there were serious obstacles. But the English and the Dutch colonists began to 'warm up' to the land, to develop an affectionate relationship with it, to take it into their hearts only as they discovered here and there that the fishing was excellent, the game abundant, and the climate salubrious. . . . . .

"Take, for example Francis Higginson, writing of New England's Plantation in 1630: what makes his heart beat faster is the admirable fertility of the soil and the abundance of sea-fish, which 'are almost beyond believing; and sure I should scarce have believed it except I had seen it with my own eyes. I saw great stores of whales, and grampuses, and such abundance of mackerels that it would astonish one to behold; likewise cod fish. . . . . .There is a fish called a bass, a most sweet and wholesome fish as ever I did eat. . . . . and besides bass, we take plenty of scates and thornback, and abundance of lobsters, and the least boy in th Plantation may both catch and eat what he will of them. For my own part, I was soon cloyed with them, they were so great and fat and luscious.' There is a kind of palatal emotion here which, if Francis Higginson allows it to run riot, may work havoc with his other worldliness."

He tells of George Alsop writing to his father about Maryland, 1666 in "a rather frolicsome mood of discovery." . . .

Speaking of Jonathan Edwards he says:

"Poor man. . . . . .On one occasion, in 1737, this divine glory on the face of nature by the banks of Hudson's river lasted near an hour, and kept him for the greater part of the time 'in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.'"

He uses the figure of torchbearers for those who discover the new truth. Washington Irving is one of the torchbearers:

"The emotional discovery of Hudson's river and valley . . . . . Irving was not a very resolute secessionist nor a very aggressive discoverer; but Irving did a very precious and magical thing: he loved New York and the Hudson Valley and he took them into his heart, the old Dutch town and the river, and he recreated them for the imagination, and fixed them there in a mellow atmosphere of their own, like a golden city under the sea, mingling its tender glamour forever with the light of our common day."

"To take any part of the earth into your heart transfigures it for you and for all men whom you can persuade to use your eyes. And the transfiguring discovery of America has, in most periods, proceeded bit by bit,

in the hearts of men like Cooper who took the forest into his heart, and Dana and Melville who took the sea into their hearts, and Hawthorne who declared that New England was as large a lump of the earth as his heart could hold, and Bret Harte who embraced the red-shirted forty-niners, and Mark Twain who took the Mississippi into his heart, and Joaquin Miller who embraced the Sierras, and G. W. Cable and Joel Chandler Harris who transfigured Georgia and New Orleans by discovering them as facts for the heart and the imagination.

During the 18th century he writes:

> The best brains in western Europe walked boldly out of the twilight of the Middle Ages into modern times; and the best brains in America walked out with them.....

There is irony in the following passage, which is justifiable inasmuch as Professor Shorey's whole address was an attack on Mr. Sherman's stand in literary criticism.

> The advancement of letters does not wait for gentlemen or scholars or societies of gentlemen and scholars or for good Republicans or good Prebyterians or for native Americans whose ancestors landed in the seventeenth century. Literature betrays a profound social unconcern about the sort of people she carries in her crew, provided only they are adept in hoisting sails and making a landing on terra incognita through a roaring surf. If you wish to advance letters in any signal degree, you will have to run some risk of getting your feet wet. You will have to renounce the antiquarian mind. You will have to accept the society of your contemporaries, for better, for worse, as your portion.....

Toward the end of the essay Mr. Sherman describes and quotes from three poets not disclosing the names until the end. The poets cited were Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. . . ."And they discovered America as a major heartbeat of humanity in the frame of the universe."

# The Gaiety of Socrates

Excerpt

Ladies and gentlemen, when I meditate on the grim-eyed gravity of modern scholarship, I long to talk with some old scholar's ghost who lived before the Efficiency Experts were born. When I consider most thoughtfully the one thing needful to add the last touch of grace to a Phi Beta Kappa banquet, I think of the invincible gaiety of Socrates. He was the gravest man in Greece; but he was also the blithest. He was the best diner-out in Athens, and every banquet that he attended was a revel. He had the ugliest satyrlike face that the gods ever moulded for one of the children of men; but there was celestial sunlight in his mind. And whether he was discoursing on the divine and the earthly loves at the house of Agathon, or whether he was driving the sophist Protagoras into the intricate net of his dialectic, this superfluous celestial sunlight played about his crooked mouth in a feasting smile that filled the handsomest men in the city with envy and with rapture. And when he made an after-dinner speech, the guests forgot the buffoon and the Syracusian dancing girl provided by their host; and they forgot the vine-crowned goblets of clear wine; for they had drunk the deeper intoxication of the Socratic gaiety; and when he rose to depart, the young men rose and followed him, like bees following the scent of honey, and they went out, walking and talking still, to meet the grey-eyed dawn.

# LIKE A FINE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN: THE ESSAYS OF EDMUND GOSSE

Though Mr. Gosse is a man of letters without a thesis and with little provocative quality, he has developed, in fifty years devoted to books, much quiet charm. He leads one through these various essays with an easy and experienced suavity which persuades one from the outset that suitable things are going to be said and well said, with gentlemanly animation but without undue emphasis. He is so true an Englishman that his heart will ever respond with an extra beat at the thought of Raleigh's tragic story. He is himself so much of the poet-scholar that he can never cease to value the spade-work or the cheery notes of those rather dusty brothers, the Wartons, back there in the dull mid-eighteenth century whistling up the dawn of romanticism. He is so much a Victorian that he is not quite ready to acquiesce in the conspiracy of silence which this generation has formed against the once-splendid reputations of Bulwer and Disraeli. A lover of old writers, he is yet so friendly to new ones that he weaves a fine garland of poems by soldier bards, which "Englishmen will not allow to be forgotten." He is so much a classicist that he comments with real relish on Lord Cromer's translations from Moschus; and so much an aristocrat that he enters with perfect sympathy into the literary recreations of a retired British proconsul. Having occasion to speak of Lord Redesdale's heir, who fell in the war, he writes: "His eldest son, Major the Hon. Clement Milford"; and one feels a pleasant glow of satisfaction in the assurance that this is precisely the way in which one should mention the eldest son of Lord Redesdale. Taste, tact, and temper designated Mr. Gosse from his youth as the man to call upon when a poet laureate died or whe n the hundredth anniversary of a classic fell to be celebrated or when a new citizen was to be admitted to good and regular standing in the Republic of Letters.

It is not difficult to perform these functions after a fashion; but it requires a fine and rare art to perform them well. It requires an art rooted in the best traditions and nourished by habitual contact with men who unfeignedly value in literature a certain vital decorum, the unfailing mark of works worthy of permanent remembrance. Mr. Gosse possesses this art; and therefore his commemorations are not perfuntory but recreative with the true academic unction. His literary character and predilections were formed just before the fashion of the Victorian age took its strong bias towards charlatanry and infected young writers with the strident vices of journalism. He came in with a group of knights of the pen, many of them Scotchmen--Lang, Dobson, Archer, Colvin, Henley, Stevenson-- who clung to the old "religion of letters"; identified their style with their honor, looked upon a page of prose with amorous but exacting eye, and made their pleasure their profession. The gusto of amateurs and the skill of patient craftsmen unite to constitute the special charm of this group at its emergence, in its springtime, when these dashing young talents were studying old French verse and wearing out copies of Herrick in the pockets of their velveteen jackets--before the individual members had grown apart, and grown up, and grown old, and dangerously facile and overproductive. Mr. Gosse, who now speaks of himself as an aged mourner preparing to attend the obsequies of the Victorian time, fluted his lyrics in those vernal days with the rest of them. Yet forty years ago, when he was just turned thirty, he was already marked by R. L. Stevenson, that happy blend of Villon and Calvin, as a natural born academician, one manifestly destined, all in due time, to become librarian to the House of Lords. In 1879 Steven-

son wrote with playful thrust, apropos of some decorous and mellow utterance of his friend: "My dear Gosse, I have greatly enjoyed your article which seems t o me handsome in tone, and written like a fine old English gentlemen."

In forty years Mr. Gosse has lost none of the virtue of his youth. In the meanwhile that virtue has been steadily disappearing from contemporary English literature. And so, without thesis or other provocative qualities, he gives us a delightful collection of essays, distinguished in that it is handsome in tone and written like a fine old English gentleman. In his half century of letters he has seen many prosperous reputations ruined by the vicissitudes of fashion; and he raises, without explicitly answering, the question whether there is, after all, any fixable standard of taste. The answer which he has accepted for himself is everywhere implicit in the sustained amenity of his tone, which one finds especially charming when he is drawing from the life, as in his portraits of Lady Dorothy Nevill, Lord Cromer, and Lord Redesdale, Anyone who desires to vivify his conception of a "fine old English gentleman" should turn in this book to the pages where Mr. Gosse and the Consul-General from Egypt converse together over the fragments of Empedocles.

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Some Versions of a Man of Letters. New York: 1920.

WHAT IS BIOGRAPHICAL TRUTH?

Mr. Hellman's title is a red rag run up to invite and excite attack from the ranks of the Old Stevensonians, such as Mr. Will Low and Sir Sidney Colvin, whose most deadly form of attack is silence. Yet the book is packed with contentious stuff. It obfuscates more than it clarifies. It raises ten new questions for one that it answers. It bristles in all directions with insult and injury disguised as "justice." When I first read it I was hilarious with rage.

To calm my over-heated mind to the critical temperature, I sat down and meditated a while on Stevenson's little fable called "The Touchstone." It tells the story of a king who was weary of living among the shadows of things, and offered his daughter in marriage to the man who should bring him the touchstone of truth.

Two sons of a neighbor king loved the princess. To the younger of them their partial father gave a piece of a mirror out of the royal treasury, saying, "Here is the touchstone which shows truth; for there is no truth but plain truth." With this bit of old mirror, the younger son easily and quickly wins and weds the princess--her mind and heart, I fancy, being essentially "bourgeois."

The elder son, unaware that everything has been settled and the choice made, goes through the world widely, seeking for the real touchstone of truth. In every place where he makes enquiry, men reply: "We alone, of all men, possess the thing itself, and it hangs in the side of our chimney to this day." He collects all of these fireside touchstones that he can find--red, blue, and green--and carries them in his wallet. When they are put together he observes that they

lose their light and color. Finally, he is given a clear colorless pebble. When this is placed among the other stones, it restores their beauty and itself becomes the brightest of all.

"How if this be the truth," he exclaims, "that all are a little true?"

There in a nutshell--or rather in a pebble--is my own conviction about biographical truth.

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Each generation and each individual biographer, as long as the subject attracts, will go on serving up the man in a different "sauce," in a different posture, light, costume--what you will, just as we dress, redress, and undress Catherine of Russia, Washington, Voltaire, St. Francis, or Jesus. Only when each generation and each individual resolutely does so, has it a change of telling its own relative truth. Only so has any sort of truth a chance of being kept alive.

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In writing a biography nowadays, the main thing is to include as much as you can of what competent biographers twenty-five years ago regarded as "nobody's business." The current theory is that no dead man has a right to a private life. Once you are in your tomb--supposing you have done anything notable in the world--once you are in your tomb, your private life in its entirety reverts to the State, and the public acquires a right to have a faithful and exhaustive statement made concerning your intimate domestic relations and concerning especially the facts of your sexual life.

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Mr. Hellman utters words, brave and austere, about the scholar's "duty," "courage," "honor," and "truth," as if he had the real touchstone of truth hanging in the side of his own chimney. It

is just conceivable that Mr. Hellman is slightly intoxicated by the brave sound of these words, and has thus acquired a mystical sense that he is giving us "the real thing." But that is an illusion. Mr. Hellman is a cook--like all the other biographers. He is merely using a tabasco sauce which happens to be popular in 1925.

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I think Mr. Hellman sincerely desires to break through the "mist of illusion" and to see Stevenson as he really was, for better or for worse.

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When Stevenson died, Mrs. Stevenson, who did not like Henley, magnanimously offered to send him as a memento the British flag which had hung over Vailima and had draped the coffin. Henley refused to accept it. Mr. Hellman comments: "I wonder whose was the more magnificent gesture, that of the brave woman in offering the flag, that of the brave man in refusing it." I can't in the least taste the quality of Henley's "magnificence" in this case. But what a personal affair taste is, isn't it?

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The chapter (referring to the letters of Mrs. Osbourne to Mr. Hellman) as a whole, however, impresses me as sentimental, spiteful, vapid, worthless, and nauseating. It spreads its ill odor throughout the book.

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To the long list of silly things in the book I would add at least these: -----

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To my mind, at any rate, it is a betrayal of extraordinary naivetés to say that "in some ways" Mrs. Stevenson was a "fortunate" and in other respects a very "unfortunate" wife for R. L. S. The statement may sound profound to bachelors and virgins but there is no married man who is not aware that "in some ways" all conceivable wives are "unfortunate." In some ways, all human relations whatever are unfortunate and limiting.

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Suppose Mrs. Stevenson was a taskmaster and a jailer to her husband. Suppose she did separate him from his roistering friends, bully him, tyrannize over him, repress his philandering and his suicidal tendencies, prevent his getting drunk with Henley, burn his realistic novel on the life of a harlot (which may have been poor as well as realistic) or goad him into burning it. Suppose she did all these things and a hundred others of like sort.

Hadn't she a right to, if she could? Hadn't Stevenson a right to resist her, if he could? And didn't he resist her all he could? I haven't a doubt that he did. What prevented his fighting without compromise? His recognition, of course, that a good bit of truth and good sense were on her side. Wasn't what Stevenson actually published the result of their contention, and due neither to his unchecked flow nor to her dictation? Doubtless, what issued from that dire conflict was his "truth," as well as he could speak it, being a married man and a social being in his time, place, and circumstances.

What we are getting at now is not the "true" Stevenson. It is only "our" Stevenson, the new Stevenson, the Stevenson of 1925, caricatured according to the taste of Mr. Hellman and Mr. Steuart rather than according to the taste of Mr. Balfour and Sidney Colvin.

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Biography is an art. All art is the record of personal impressions. And all personal impressions result, in a sense, in caricature. That is why biography has to be rewritten indefinitely.

Mr. Hellman's rewriting irritates me so much that I have left small space to explain why I read his book with interest. It would be only half the truth to say that his virtue lies in his researches. He has exhumed and published a considerable mass of manuscript. -----

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The other half of the truth is that Mr. Hellman's "true Stevenson" interests and amuses me precisely because it is a modish caricature, violently distorting the features, grotesquely reinterpreting known

facts. It interests me precisely because his humorless and absurd prosecution of Mrs. Stevenson starts one's mind to running idly on the beauty of an absolutely unlimited existence and on the intolerable tyranny of woman--and on the godlike fortitude and humor which enable most of us not merely to endure it but to enjoy it.

THE TRUE STEVENSON, by George S. Hellman. Boston
Reprinted from "Books", N. Y. Herald Tribune, December 20, 1925.

* * *

The following quotation comes from a letter of Mr. Sherman's to his son. It explains his furor in the above essay, and in the essays "R.L.S. Encounters the Modern Writers" and "Who Made the Sevenenson Myth." [1]

> "Sevenson, by the way,--I've been through a lot of his literary criticism, his papers on the technique of letters and his ethical essays--Stevenson was a very expert craftsman, and also a very fine, gay, sound-spirited man, with an independent, strongly individual bent. You ought to read some of this side of his work. I think you are acquainted hitherto almost exclusively with the stories and romances. The morality (I use the word in the broad sense of the view of life and personal conduct) would, I believe, affect you now as favorably as the stories did when you were younger. The Letters, too, are very gay and bracing reading; I've read them over and over. I'm going to have another crack at his adverse critics--malicious, idle, ignorant dogs."

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 777

BENVENUTO CELLINI

---------Yet how, in certain moods, one envies him the huge lustiness that often goes along with this ruddy self-satisfaction. How one envies him the immense gusto, the hod-blooded excitement, which he carried into every moment of his career.

He is pleased with everything that pertains to himself--so heartily pleased that his pleasure radiates from him and warms the heart of the reader. There was his birth, for example--in every way fortunate, as he feels it. He was born in the afternoon of All Saints' Day, in the year 1500, and his pious father, expecting a girl, thanked God for a boy and called him Benvenuto, which is the Italian for Welcome. There was the golden aureole which, after the religious experiences of his middle life, he declared was visible at certain hours of the day resting upon him as a token of divine election. There was his facile virtuosity--and a delight in all the details of his profession which made the most difficult tasks a recreation. "This came," he says, "from the special gift which the God of nature bestowed on me; that is to say, temperament so happy and of such excellent parts that I was freely able to accomplish whatever it pleased me to take in hand."

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Do not imagine that I am undulating to present Cellini as an abhorent monster. The fact is that I admire and envy him in many respects enormously. I envy him his astounding literary gift--pure natural talent.

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---------Cellini's virtues and vices were positively leonine. His fear of God was slight--he was so sure he was on the inside track. The law he took into his own hands--he was "above the law." There is no evidence that he ever weakened his initiative by respecting his neighbor. He was neither domestic nor monogamous, nor reason-professing, nor pacific. He was superstitious. He drank, lived

loose and stabbed. But his devotion to his art was admirable His self-expression was complete. His faith in himself was magnificent. To his own immense satisfaction he "proved his manhood and achieved renown."

And so in his lusty old age he washed his bloody hands and did not doubt that when he entered in to the joy of the Lord he would be saluted at the gate of death, as he had been saluted at the gate of life, cheerfully by his given name Benvenuto--"Welcome."

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It is a masterly, enthralling narrative packed with vital experience - every paragraph quivering alive from the first line to the last."

Reprinted from The Mentor, October, 1926.

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## SQUIRE OSBALDESTON: AN OLD ENGLISH SPORT

SQUIRE OSBALDESTON: HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY is a book as magnificent as venatorial piety could make it. Handsomely printed in a big quarto volume, it is richly illustrated with sixteen full-page hunting scenes in color and seventy-five in black and white by Alken, Ferneley, Richard and Joshua Dighton and other masters treasured in private collections. The editor of The Field contributes a critical yet enthusiastic introduction, and Mr. Cuming's commentary, running to nearly a hundred pages, is an erudite and amorously detailed amplification of the Squire's narrative--a document as precious in its own field as Caesar's COMMENTARIES of the LIFE OF BENVENUTO CELLINI.

In the early nineteenth century, now generally regarded as the golden or the Augustan age of English hunting, Squire Osbaldeston was facile princeps with horse and hound and gun. A tough little man he was, five feet high, with features, according to one observer, "like a cub fox." In the opinion of many eminent judges, he was not

merely the central pillar of English sport; he fully merited the inscription on his snuff box: "To the best sportsman of any age or country, G. Osbaldeston, Esq., of Pitsford Hall."

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His pre-eminent fame he won, of course, as master of foxhounds. But he was strictly "first rate" in many other directions, and his dazzling effect upon his contemporaries was due in no small measure to the ranging versatility of his excellence. As Sir Theodore Cook admiringly remarks: "Nearly everything he did was done as well as almost any one living Englishman could do it." For example, he killed 100 pheasants with 100 shots; 97 grouse with 97 shots; 20 brace of partridges with 40 shots. Now, that could hardly be bettered, one should suppose, except with a Maxim gun in a poultry yard, yet there is record of a British sportsman in the Squire's time who bagged something like 1,500 pheasants in a day's shooting.

Osbaldeston's records generally involved a bet on his own pluck or endurance. He rode for a wager 200 miles in less than nine hours, in fifty four-mile heats, employing one thoroughbred after another. He was one of the best six cricketers in England. At tennis, with a handicap of only fifteen, he beat the champion Barre, playing with a gloved hand against the professional racquet. At the age of sixty-eight he rode his own horse in the March Stakes at Goodwood. He drove Hellfire Dick's coach and team, as a member of the Four-in-Hand Club. He kept up his coursing, his rowing, his gamecocks, his fighting mastiffs, his whist, his billiards. He rode the best horses, he bred the best hounds in England. He hunted ten counties with uniform success, and as master of foxhounds he established new standards for the sport.

What impresses one most in the Squire is the absolute purity of his dedication to his career.

. . . . . He carefully shunned the thorn-bit of marriage.

He lost £1,000,000 by betting and helping race horses during a period of forty-five years.

* * *

The serenity which arises from complete consecration to one's calling is manifest in the things which the Squire ignores. "If you were to judge by his own words," says his editor, "you might conclude that from the day he went to school till he was carried to his grave nothing outside Great Britain interested him at all. Neither the menace nor the catastrophe of Napoleon moved him in the least. Trafalgar and Waterloo are never mentioned. The vicissitudes of Europe leave him undisturbed." So do the vicissitudes of England. His little bulldog mind is happily engaged in keeping his seat in the saddle and improving the breed of his dogs. There isn't any indication that in his eighty years he ever so much as heard of "social thinking." Sturdy--that is what Squire Osbaldeston was, sturdy.

# E P I G R A M S *

"Our life is composed of love, and not to love is to cease to live."

Power is the good which the world craves.

All things which have great power are greatly dangerous till they are controlled to right ends; but they are not more dangerous than weak things put in a place where strength is required.

Cutting additional facets in one's poetical character is interesting.

It is good for us to love the things we live with.

When you let off steam (speaking of loss of proportion) your sense of humor flies out at the escape valve with the steam.

There is almost always a practical outlet for the energy that we waste in extravagant emotion.

It is astounding to consider what a fine little cosmos one might create by working out all the consequences of courage with grace.

Passion--the quest for perfection is the driving force of life.

Make as much mental capital out of your present experience as you can, as you go along.

Regarded as material to think about; almost anything may be treated as mildly amusing--look at yourself as a spectator of your own play, and all sorts of rather interesting points come out.

Two principal props upon which human happiness depends is work and love.

Be of good cheer and of high and difficult enterprise. (a saying)

* The epigrams have been selected for the expression of their thought.

# E P I G R A M S

Nothing people covet more when they are honest than a capacity for enjoyment.

God made us thrive on hard work and it was a good plan.

The only students that are of any promise are those who do far more than they are required to do.

When you live in your mind it makes little difference where your body is.

There are no uninteresting things, there are only uninterested people.*

The prestige in his own eyes which a man gets from the habit of squarely facing his fears, helps to make him fearless and gives him steadiness and confidence.

English Literature is the student's main road to culture, the culture that Arnold meant; a knowledge of the best that has been said and done in the world.

In general, those who stand on their dignity have nothing else to stand on.

The real business of religion is to reconcile us to our necessities.

The things that people have in common are the things that hold them together.

I believe in being all there whatever you are doing.

The salt of the right critic is the love of truth.

Science without conscience is the ruin of the Soul.

The history of the human mind is the history of human folly.

If there is any power in the voice it soon makes itself felt in the world.

*This is an epigram of Gilbert Chesterton's admired by Mr. Sherman

# APPENDICES

## Appendix I

### Mr. Brownell's Tribute to Mr. Sherman on Entering the Century Club 1924

"He has eminently the cosmopolitan mind, though never disloyal to the Puritan nor supercilious toward the provincial. . . . During recent years he has enriched the literature of his country with a remarkable series of books, each unsurpassed if indeed equalled in its special field, and, though on varied subjects, allied, not to say unified, by a thoroughly personal point of view and body of doctrine. All these works exhibit wisdom distilled by study, ripened by reflection and applied by a distinguished talent to the discussion of the most pertinent and pressing themes of life as well as literature--none of them with a trace of either academic pedantry on the one hand or romantic crudity on the other. It is difficult to hold one's hand in recounting the titles of this eminent American scholar and first of American critics.

Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 736

# Appendix II

## REDEMPTION

A portion of this poem is given here with an introduction by Mr. Zeitlin. He speaks of Mr. Sherman's illness which put him in arrears with his literary engagements of which the most pressing was this Phi Beta Kappa poem which was sheduled to be read at Harvard during Commencement week:

> As was usual with him, he was nervously apprehensive of not meeting expectations, though Professor Palmer assured him that he had been chosen because his style was allied to the refinement of poetry. As was usual, too, he acquitted himself with distinction when the time came. He took the war for his theme and put into the poem the distilled essence of his feelings and his hopes. Beginning in a key of subdued solemnity with a mournful undertone, he ascended with stately beat to where the emotion of the ode culminates with throbbing movement on a note of fervent consecration, and concluded with these stanzas:[1]

"O watchers for the dawn,
Let us go down to the sea and wait
Till the dreary night is gone.

"How long? How long?

"Till soon or late
The House of Hate
Is shattered,
The Kings uncrowned, unflattered,
Like winds in winter scattered
Or words of wanton song.

"O watchmen of the night,
Let us go down to the sea and wait
With one accord
For the first slow fingers of the light,
Silent as men expecting great reward,
The end of ancient wrong,
A Risen Lord.

"How long: How long?

"Till soon or late,
She whom we watched for all the night
Out of the grey dawn slips,
Runs down the rejoicing sea,
With olives crowned, in garments white
Wind-blown and beautiful and bright--
The Winged Victory!
Speeding before the ships,
Her trumpet at her lips
To hail a world setfree!" *

*The complete poem is in the Widener Library, Cambridge, Mass.

[1] Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 359.

# Appendix III

## JOAQUIN MILLER

Excerpt

This glowing summary--this grand climax is taken from the Introduction of Mr. Sherman's book on Joaquin Miller's poetry. It is revised in the book Americans:

> "He had not really achieved a distinctive poetic style. He had not been a thinker. He had been a pathfinder to the imagination; like Whitman, he had blazed away into new territories. He had brought something of beauty and splendor into American literature. He exulted in the wide lands and seas which he first had annexed to the provinces of song. He had sung the exodus across the plains. He had pictured the great American Desert. He had celebrated the forested heights of the Sierras, the giant trees of the Mariposa Grove, and the falls of the Yosemite. He had been a myth-maker and had sown with poetic legends all his western land from the Yukon and the snowy peaks of Mt. Ranier and Mt. Shashta through the golden poppy fields of the central valleys to San Diego Bay--Nicaragua, and the Amazon River.
>
> He had made captive for romance the outlaws of old Spanish California, the priests and bandits of Mexico, the scouts of Fremont, dusky Indian heroines and the motley multitude of the gold-seekers. He had been the champion of oppressed peoples--the Southern Confederacy, the native American tribes, the Jews of Russia and Palestine. tje Cubans, the Boers, the Yellow men and the Mexicans in California. And then to widen his horizon at sunset he had threaded the golden straits and had sailed 'on-and on' to the Arctic Sea, to Hawaii, to the Orient, chanting as he sailed, ever ready for fresh adventure, ever in love with light, color, and movement, ever himself the romantic troubadour, the picturesque incarnation of the spirit which pervades his poems."

Appendix IV

Men of Letters of the British Isles

Portrait Medallions from the Life

By Theodore Spicer-Simson

with Critical Essays By

Stuart P. Sherman

and a Preface

By G. T. Hill

1924

Authors and Poets Portrayed

| | |
|---|---|
| Arnold Bennett | Ralph Hodgson |
| J. D. Beresford | A. E. Housman |
| Laurence Binyon | W. H. Hudson |
| Robert Bridges | Douglas Hyde |
| G. K. Chesterton | James Joyce |
| Padraic Colum | John Masefield |
| Joseph Conrad | George Meridith |
| William H. Davies | Sir Henry Newbolt |
| Walter De La Mare | George Russell (A. E.) |
| Charles M. Doughty | George Bernard Shaw |
| John Drinkwater | James Stephens |
| Lord Dunsany | Hugh Walpole |
| St. John Ervine | H. G. Wells |
| John Galsworthy | W. B. Yeats |
| Thomas Hardy | |

10 copies on Bachelor hand-made paper
520 copies on Rives paper.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

Laurence Binyon

Musing under Oxford spires and idyllic moment by Hinksey Ferry or threading the sedgy, heron-haunted upper reaches of the Thames; a choice which hovers in wintry woods between"beauty of young flames or wonder of white snow"; a yearning for experience and purity; odes to daffodils, pansies, harebells, tiger lilies, larks, beauty, time, love, then the coming of love in the right high English Fashion with an Italian honeymoon and high earnest English lovers with hands clasped under the starry night, speaking of bygone saints and sages and dreaming of their own posterity while they look down into "Umbria dim with valleys, dark with a hundred hills"; ambitious flights, variations on the death of Tristram, lofty blank verse on the death of Adam, Penthesilea; thunder on the downs--the great war a troubling interlude in the fragrant quietude of country life,--blood on the grass, stretchers and the odour of blood among the white blooms in English gardens--proud speeches to the dead, and decorous, resonant, liberal addresses to France and America; disillusion; the discovery of evil; philosophic questionings; affirmation of the soul--"Deep, deep within man's soul are all his victories won"; return to the birds and flowers--to mercy, courage, kindness, mirth.

Such is Mr. Binyon's lyrical and narrative substance; and it is as "sound" as a sunrise, or a snow-bank, or a bank of primroses, or the song of a skylark, which, would doubtless think us very impertinent or world-weary persons if we checked his sunward soaring to enquire how his song of to-day differed from yesterday's, and that from the song of his grandfather.

Portrait Medallions

Gilbert Keith Chesterton

A solidly squarely planted figure with a defiant and challenging eye, ready to encounter all comers. Gilbert Keith Chesterton is a versatile man of letters with a mission which none of his manifold literary activities quite adequately illustrate. A redoubtable journalist, a fertile aphorist and tireless paradoxer, a scintillating essayist, a traveler, and theologian. Mr. Chesterton has agilely employed his ten talents and upwards to fortify the grand Chestertonian idea, which is, to cast a shimmering and irridescent veil of wit and romance over the plain body of common sense, and to reinvest in glory the traditional Anglo-Saxon Johnsonian Englishman, honest, prejudiced, virile, humorous, pious, violent and sentimental.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

James Stephens

James Stephens is a lover of Cathleen ni Horlchan and all her ancient lore.

One of the most lovable and sympathetic figures among the younger imaginative writers of Ireland, James Stephens forces a spell, or a number of spells, which preserve him from the malice of fairyland and from a merely futile dalliance in elfin grots. He possesses abundant humour, quaint, clean and tender; he loves real earth and sunlight, and the song of the birds, he has a heart as well as an imagination; he likes people and he understands their work-a-day lives as well as their dreams.

His poetry and tales like the little flowers of St. Francis, bear a message to an impoverished pain-stricken and quarrelsome world.

Epigram There is nothing common, nothing vulgar, after love has transfigured it.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

John Drinkwater

Before the war John Drinkwater was a lyric poet of a sort that American readers discover slowly and in no great numbers.

His song came out of a quiet and happy life with books, nature and friends.

He loved England in a deep instinctive fashion which had nothing to do with the British Empire. He loved her for the pastoral beauty that springs from her forty shires--for her cotswold farmers, her Derbyshire lovers, her Gloucestershire daffodils, her Avon meadows, for Grasmere and for Rydal Water. He loved her for Thomas Hardy and Wordsworth and Marvel and Herrick and for all the English souls, serene and joyous, who century after century, have drawn apart from politics and merchandising in order to taste untroubled the sweetness of shared solitude in a cottage overgrown with roses and supplied with apples from the orchard and currants from the garden. When Mr. Drinkwater wrote poems 1908-1919, he was a recluse--with youth and plenty of social talent yet the special notes of distinction in this book are notes of the

(John Drinkwater)

recluse: a certain austerity in the art--a cherishing of the "difficult phrase" and something of ascetic coolness and tranquility at the heart of his ardour--notes which first estrange and then attract.

Enthusiasm and beauty of expression--This poetic love for England--even in the printed book, where the bold simplicity of language and the quaintness of Mr. Drinkwater's clear apprehension of the essentials is impressive, rise to heights of dignity.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

W. H. Hudson

Hudson is before us now as a "very great writer," a great naturalist, author of masterpieces of romance, Green Mansions and The Purple Band, the best short story in the English language El Ombre and a score of other volumes of bird books, tales and reminiscences, each are so fascinating that readers who have tasted one 'cannot be restrained' from rushing to the rest. Of all the living writers, says Mr. Galsworthy, now that Tolstoi has gone--I could least dispense with W. H. Hudson. . . .

He discovered the joy of wild nature and developed an especial passion for birds.

With American-born parents but with an English heart and ancestry, Hudson waked to consciousness of the world on a sheep-ranch harbouring a little lonely and musty Anglo-Saxon culture in a wide land of pampas, where old Spanish patriarchs peopled their domains with half breed bastards and fierce gauchos, quick at the knife play, peerless in the saddle, rounded up myriads of cattle to a wastefull slaughter of horns and hides in the primitive days when plague-ravaged Buenos Aires stank like a shambles. Scenes of cruelty, tumultuous fires and storms on the plains, the passing of a

routed army--these things stamped themselves on the boy's brain like spots of savage color. But the rich vein in the narrative is the remembered joys of youth, its escapades and adventures, the first horse, the first gun, questing the eggs of the golden plover, duck-hunting in lonely marshes at dawn, sense quickening to the coming and passing of flowers in the Spring and to the melody of migrating flocks of subarctic birds--These things, first taken with a frolic welcome grow steadily to a fixity of interest, and as the boy advances into the essential solitude of early manhood, they become the subject of a passion almost mystical of an indescribable sweetness: this is the charm which makes hardened critics murmur over W. H. Hudson like a swarm of intoxicated bees.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

Padraic Colum

Padraic Colum is probably associated in the minds of most American readers with that municipality of the Irish Republic which non-Gaelic speaking people call New York where largely through the columns of the New Republic, he has in the last half-dozen years became a familiar figure as a poet with the celtic note and as a literary critic with special knowledge of Irish letters. As a matter of fact he is a genuine product of young Ireland,--an interpreter of the Celtic genius.

This poetic character, as exhibited in Dramatic Legends and Wild Earth, has as yet no very definite contour. It centres, indeed, in one grand passion--his love of Ireland. But he works from without inward and except in a half-dozen love songs and in his keening for the Irish matyrs, his love dispenses itself with equal and mild intensity over ploughmen and drovers and beggars and children in the cradle and spinning women and old women of the roads and ballad makers--as if with the deliberate intent of proving that nothing which is Irish can fail to appeal to the imagination as beautiful.

To his other services as interpreter of the Celtic genius, Mr. Colum added in 1922 an interesting Anthology of Irish verse, arranged to illustrate the emotional life of the

(Padraic Colum)

people rather than to represent the individual poets. His latest publication is a somewhat chaotic Irish romance, Castle Conquer, as incoherently crowded with characters and incidents as a country fair.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

Thomas Hardy

No other author of the Victorian time has cut a sharper silhouette against his century. He has left an impression of high sincerity and integrity. He has treated things human and divine with the austerity and the tenderness which mark a writer in the grand style. Fascinated by the intensity of his sombre vision, we have praised him for his unflinching representation of the blight which infects the world.

A quiet man, "scathed and memoried" by fourscore years and upwards Thomas Hardy stands by the garden gate in the twilight of a scented summer evening and gazes with a pitying scrutiny into the cankered heart of a rose, "wonder and wormwood! wormwood and wonder!" he murmurs to himself, and these are the two poles of his meditation on the mystery of life.

Musing on the canker in the rose with the utmost seriousness of a tragic imagination, he conceived a God who is source of all energy, contriver of all circumstances; the Supreme ironist, enigmatic, mocking, whimsically cruel yet himself so cross-purposed and so blindly fumbling towards some higher form of activity that he has yet enjoyed that even a mortal is constrained to pity the President of the Immortals

as the great Scapegoat of the Universe--to say nothing of such subaltern ministers of his as Chance, Hate, Time, Sickness, Death and their human victories.

Under this overarching dominion of supernal powers, flashing its lights and shadows upon the earthly scene, he created Wessex--no mere tract of earth but a tract of time as well, a tract enriched with an ancient past, opening dim vistas into medieval cloisters Saxon villages, Roman forts, grim Druid ruins and dusky recesses of the Stone Age.

Memoried time, pregnant with dooms, broods like a purple haze over the fair s uthern English countryside with its sheepcote and granges, its clustering hamlets, cathedral towns, harvest fields, rich vales, slow rivers, woods, hills barren heath, and wave-beaten headlands with the sea-mews wheeling in the briny Atlantic air. Here honest rugged yeomen and young men of aspiration and talent fall desperately in love with lonely and perilously lovely romantic heroines without an idea in their heads and with no apparent business in the world but to wreck the lives of their lovers. Passionate love thwarted and brought to disastrous issue by a conspiracy of accidental circumstances with the imperfections in man's nature, is the soul of the plot.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

George Russel A.E.

The Irish Socrates. Perhaps the most interesting personality of young Ireland, he expresses through a multiplicity of activities a unity of spirit which is the bond of peace among many bitter factions. In a period of intense jealousies and mental enmities, no man speaks ill of A. E. even the malice of George More, which spares no sex nor age, coos like a dove in his presence; and young poets and politicians consult him as a kind of oracle.

He is prepared like Numa returning from a conference with Egevia to discuss every aspect of national being, with all conditions of men.

His proseis full of his essential poetic virtue and is at the same time of admirable lucidity.

Portrait Medallions

Joseph Conrad

His eyes are fixed forever on far sea horizons--this entranced and entrancing captain of ships, master of melodious English, incomparable interpreter of the might and mystery of the sea. With Joseph Conrad on the bridge, who would not sail before the mast? What voyages out of Bankok into the Indian Ocean or beating up the China Sea against the Monsoon! What adventurous traffic with treacherous Malays or African cannibals amid the smothering heat of jungled-wall, fever-infested tropical waters! What heroic encounters with destiny in typhoon, shipwreck, or solitary island! What appalling flashes of insight into the heart of the elemental and encompassing darkness which opens a little way before us, which closes so swiftly behind us, which wells up invasively from the abysses of our own souls.

Great worlds and water--strange lands and fares, exotic colour, the perfume of the East, barbaric feuds and hungry primitive lusts--under the plucking of these plectra his slavic temperament vibrates like a lyre. Enchanted by its music as a boy of seventeen, he brushed aside the accidents of his Polish blood and inland breeding to enter the English merchant marine and seek through the Seven Seas for the true Romance.

When he had tracked her to the fastnesses where poets fable that she dwells, he found she was not there. The true

Romance was not there. The inside of the adventure was shipwreck and starvation. The inside of the colonization was greed, hypocrisy, folly, cruelty and slavery. The inside of the "Shining Orient" was famine, vermin, and pestilence. The inside of the splendour and immensity of nature was chaos and horror--horror. And men who returned to nature from the ennui of civilization, craving the refuge of her deep embrace left their bloated bodies and marrowless bones to witness her faithfulness and their infamy.

Though visions of nature is tremendously disillusioning yet in the medst of his disillusion there gleams again for him redemptively, the true Romance, the great adventure, namely, the discovery of one's own virtue--the maintenance against the buffeting of the elements, of one's own essence.

Portrait Medallions

Excerpt

Bernard Shaw

Mr. Shaw came into English letters riding on his ideas of economic absurdity with a train of pack mules following blindly: the absurdity of war, the absurdity of patriotism, the absurdity of idealism, the absurdity of sentiment, the absurdity of Caesar and Napoleon, the absurdity of Shakespeare, the absurdity of modern marriage, the absurdity of doctors, the absurdity of duties, the absurdity of parent, the absurdity of pretty much the entire structure of our civilization.

He taught as the first axiom of revolutionary philosophy that the end of reverence is the beginning of wisdom, and as the second, that children should disobey their parents. With these levees he has industriously pried at the underpinning of the Age of Victoria.

But Mr. Shaw has always released his brood of heresies with an enigmatic curl at the corners of his mouth, and with hieroglyphic signals at the corners of his eyes which warn the spectators at this "theatre of ideas" to be wary. He sternly refuses to solicit our 'sympathies' for any of his Marionettes--that would be a breach of the Shavian discipline. He gives us

(Bernard Shaw)

indeed, dissertations upon them; but the only real help that he supplies is contained in the injunction: "Watch them, as I am doing; and use your brains, use your brains."

Excerpts

Portrait Medallions

H. G. Wells

A magnified and glorified middle class Englishman, the most widely known writer of his times essentially a super-journalist but passing also as prophet, sociologist, publicist, world-historian and foremost novelist of his day. H. G. Wells has exercised and is still exercising an enormous influence upon his contemporaries.

.....His general influence, accordingly is dissolvent. A modern Rousseau, he is first of all concerned with breaking up the "old order," which he has arraigned as priggish, prudish, dingy, furtive, canting, humbugging and bungling. The words with which he allures the hopes of the young and eager are scientific method, research, eugenics, feminism, socialism, co-operation, publicity, constructive statesmanship, efficiency, and passionate love. In scientific romances and Utopian novels he peers into reconstructed world operated by a revised human nature, against which he, like the author of the social contract would be prompt to revolt.

Mr. Wells reminds one of the peerless maitre de cuisine in the Fortunes of Migel who made out of the hind quarter of one salted "horse forty five couverts" so adroitly concocted that none of his guests could tell "what the devil any one of them were made upon at all."

The main recipe of our suave modern chef may, however, be expressed thus:

> "Take equal parts of science, sex, and sociology - mix thoroughly - serve hot."

A skeletonized novel prepared according to this tremendously popular formula reads about as follows:

"On my completion of my course at the Royal College of Science, I had intended to carry on extensive investigation in Embryology; but after some hectic years of experimentation and hunger, I found myself comfortably established as chief chemist to a manufacturing company, organized to supply powdered soup to South America and Mexico.

.....In early middle life I discovered that I had permanently attached myself by marriage to a good woman with a sallow complexion who made no adequate responses to my nature---

As I passed from my office at a little after twelve o'clock on the third of April 192-, my glance fell upon a belated typist bending over her instrument. The down at the nape of her neck was the soft fluff on a newly hatched chick.---Suddenly we found ourselves in one another's arms---Never before had I known the qualities of passionate kisses---that evening as I lifted the latch of my garden gate, it came upon me in a flash of illumination that I should have to reconstruct from the bottom of my entire universe---At midnight, sitting still at my desk, my head buried in my arms half listening to the nightingales in the lime trees, I knew that henceforth my life work was to be the application of science to the creation of a human society more clearly answerable to the heart's desire."

Excerpts

Portrait Medallions

Walter de la Mare

His work, though it is not very definitely localized, is very definitely English, with centuries of quiet civilization working in it for choiceness of diction, lightness of touch, and a kind of pristine purity and limpidity of feeling, at one with the artist.

The accents of his praise fall upon things which take their beauty from "those who loved them in other days." There is little of romantic iridescence and nothing "lush" in the landscape which his poems leave as an abiding presence in the imagination.....

One fancies him writing with a quill pen by candle light and pausing, now and then, to peer through the leaded panes of a vine-screened casement into the sparkling dusk of an early winter evening through which the rooks are winging their flight to an ancient wood.

If he is not content with such lovely lyrics as Shadow, Keep Innocency, and Farewell and with such exquisite and adorable fantasies as Sam's Three Wishes and Phantom, one can imagine him desiring to be the author of Go Lovely Rose, or Vaughn's Retreat, or the Songs of Sidney and Surrey or The Robin Hood Ballads or the Nun's Priests' tale of Chaucer.

He has a medieval delight in pure colour--in blue-- and gold and scarlet, but his atmosphere though bright--is frosty and still--the small red sun is mirrored in an icy pool; the

witch in her crimson shawl comes over the snow, and elves in green and gold hop in and out among the holly berries or vanish under immemorial yews encrusted with starry lichen.

* * *

In a world that is old and cold and bright with frost and stars, bliss is a little thing like a spark in the night, and the cosy and quiet folk are few--rabbits in their burrows, birds in their nests, and children in their beds. If one could draw a magic circle around their "infant joy" and keep it young forever!

If a man had three wishes, would not the first bring back the roses to the old mother's cheek, and the second seat him at her knee a boy again? Who could desire to be very great that had the choice of being very little?

This is followed by an excerpt from his "Memoirs of a Midget." The tiny person in Walter de la Mare's "Memoirs of a Midget" asks her mother of what God made all things in the forests and the birds in the sky.

"'He made them, said my mother steadily,'of His Power and Love.

"'And can we, can I, make things of my power and love?'"

"'I suppose, my dear,' replied my mother reflectively and perhaps thinking of my father in his study, over his paper and Hops, 'it is only <u>that</u> in life that is worth doing.'"

"This prose romance bears a certain symbolical relation to the author's poetical career. Like his own Midget, he has turned away from the great passions and great adventures of the

modern world to steal through the lower panel of a door into an old lost garden, where he had gazed up at the stars so long that most human activities appear to him quite midgetary and the only object which seems truly worthy of a poet's curiosity is the uncontaminated tone of a child in the moments when it is establishing its earliest imaginative relations with earth and heaven. This presence seals his lips from speaking of anything base except as a beast in a fable, and of anything grievous except as a memory and a tearless loveliness.

Portrait Medallion

Excerpt

John Masefield

Literature is not for him as it is for many of his Irish contemporaries, an escape from life. It is the exultant beginning and glorification of life. But he sings out of deep and original experience enriched by impassioned meditation, and with his own individual lilt and raciness of diction. A long-limbed west countryman with the salt wind in his hair, sea sorrow in his eyes and in his heart and on his lips song abundant, fresh and various, John Masefield is the most vitally traditional and the most poignantly English of English living poets.

In narrative, verse, and novel, in peasant tragedy and historical drama in haunting lyric and elegy--in the noble prose of Gallioppi he had brooded with increasing intensity upon the flame of heroism and splendour that between birth and oblivion irradiates an handful of dust.

Appendix V

## SELECTED MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

New York Herald-Tribune Books
Sunday, Sept. 26, 1926*

"Of the high value of Sherman's services to the American letters of his time, there can be no question. He had the very rare faculty of a man of his background of making the thing that interested him seem important and dramatic. What he wrote was read even by those who dissented from his ideas most violently."

There was never any hollow politeness about him. He said his say in plain terms but always with grace and sometimes with stirring eloquence.

It so happened that I never met him but our paths often crossed. We were for many years in opposite camps and performed dreadful operations on each other. I can only say that these combats left me with high admiration for his critical acumen and forensic skill. He was immensely plausible even when he was wrong. And he had a way very often of being brilliantly and unanswerably right.

Coming to New York made a great change in him. He lost none of his earnestness and none of his charm. His latest criticism was as fresh and lively as his first. The dullness of the academic critic was simply not in him.

His enemies though as much of him as his friends. He will be missed.

H. L. Mencken

The U. S. has had few great critics in its century and a half of national existence but S. Sherman was unquestionably one of them.

He belongs in the succession of Emerson, Poe, Lowell, Howells and Brownell and his scholarship was the best that any American critic has brought to his task.

In scholarship he was the best of rebels against tyranny of fact which obsesses American Universities. He fought against exalting the means of scholarship and forgetting the ends. His own work is distinguished by the most careful accuracy and a wealth of knowledge.

*Vol. VII, p. 13-20. Note: The complete tribute is not always given. The selection has been made for its reference to Stuart Sherman as a writer.

Selected Memorial Tributes

Witty himself and a maker of critical epigrams that will constantly be quoted. He never descended to mere cleverness and indeed was the model of our time in intellectual integrity. His work since coming to N. Y. was marked by his high and serious quality.

Dr. Canby

Stuart Sherman was more than a great gifted penetrating essayist and critic of literature. He was a forceful, versatile, incissive and understanding critic of life in a democracy striving to express itself in manifold ways.

A notably stimulating teacher and a loyal colleague and friend who shared generously the riches of his spirit and sympathy.

Keneth C. Babcock
Dean of Arts and Sciences
University of Illinois

Sherman was unique--his mellow sagacity, his shrewdness and sweetness, his magnificent rectitude, his blend of ease and subtlety as a writer, his power of distilling the significance of his subject, his command of beautiful and pointed speech. The Yankee Salt and cosmopolitan savor of his thought--these things made him an uncompanioned figure in contemporary criticism.

Laurence Gilman

"I rejoice that he lived long enough to prove himself what he was a Knight-Errant of the never ending quest of truth. And I rejoice that his splendid record of the quest will remain."

Homer Woodbridge
A Life-long friend.

He ordered by special mail Max Beerbohm's observations.... How intensely the man enjoyed and with what grace and vigour he related his mind with the world. Such rare humour. Such honesty and clarity.

Broadman Lunt

Selected Memorial Tributes

To his scholarship was added an adventurous gallantry. . . .
Sinclair Lewis

In my humble opinion, he was most brilliant and stimulating of critics.

Indeed I found the articles more interesting than the books around which they were written.
Anderson , Director of N.Y. Public Library

It marks a brief, brilliant episode in American criticism that during these final two years of his life, he produced week by week copious considered and sympathetic literary discussions which belong not in the history of news, but in the history of literature itself.

This was Stuart Sherman's excellence--he had the taste for the varieties of literature as he had for the varieties of life. . . . . .He was if the occasion called for it a tough, skillful and indeed an exultant fighter. But fighting for fight sake interested him very little. He incurred rather than sought it.

Within a circle, which was strikingly large in view of his extraordinary shyness, he exhibited a noble gift for friendship.
Somewhere in him was a greatness not to be measured.
Carl Van Doren.

Stuart Sherman was dead before he reached his forty-fifth birthday. The Editorial comment throughout the nation, emphasized the importance which literature had suffered. There was not merely a recognition of the fact that a great writer and a distinguished critic, whoi there was no one to replace had disappeared prematurely from the scene, there was a general conviction heightening the sense of his loss that Sherman was at the threshold of an unfolding of still greater powers.

For those who came into personal touch with him, Sherman's death created a void which they were scarcely able to describe. It is remarkable how many even of those who knew him but slightly or had not met him at all expressed a feeling of personal bereavement at his passing. Those who knew him best recognized with Carl Van Doren that 'somewhere in him was a greatness not to be measured.' They mourned the cruel brevity of his career and the vanishing of something that had imparted a glow, animation, and a charm to their own lives.
Jacob Zeitlin
Professor of English, Univsity of Ill.
<u>Life and Letters</u>, Vol. II,p. 800.

# SELECTED MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

"He was not merely a great critic, but a rare compound of a man of ample knowledge and also of the impulse and ability to express himself. Mr. Sherman was one of the few great readers. He knew the best that has been thought and written and from it was constantly deriving standards of judgment by which to test current literature even those parts which he undoubtedly believed to be the worst, or at least the most freakish. amd rootless that had ever been written. His work since coming to New York was marked by his high and serious quality."

New York Times

"Mr. Sherman saw with the eyes of a poet who sought with a noble and living imagination to shadow forth the great society of a future America."

Gerald Carson

"To the steadily increasing number of persons in England who follow American literary affairs, the details of Sherman's tragic death on the shore of Lake Michigan brought by this week's mail, will be received with very special regret. Many of them will agree with me when I say that he had made for himself as editor-critic a place of singular influence and that among the vivacious company of Americans devoted to the task of making a huge democracy interested in books. Sherman was very nearly the most valuable and inspiriting.

S. K. Ratcliffe
London Observer for
Sept. 5, 1926.

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